[fic+art] Staring Into Open Flame

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[fic+art] Staring Into Open Flame

by lumosatnight

Summary

"Gads, Potter. Get your grubby hands off me."

"Tell me. Where were you Thursday night?" Harry slammed Malfoy into the bathroom wall, his wand aimed at Malfoy's throat.

"Really now, darling. If you wanted to get me alone, all you had to do was ask," Malfoy rasped.

"I'm going to ask you one more time, Malfoy. Where were you?"

Malfoy's thin lips curled into a smirk. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Or, Harry tries to catch an arsonist, and Malfoy smells like smoke.

Notes

For the H/D Wireless prompt #111: *Arsonist's Lullabye* by Hozier

Warnings: This story contains graphic depictions of fire, destruction by fire, injury by fire, and death by fire (not MCD, only minor CD). But I promise it's not all death and destruction! However, if this can in any way be triggering for you, then please read with care 🖤

Thank you Rhyebony and DiandraStrikesBack for the speedy beta. And a MASSIVE thank you to Kairennart for the absolutely gorgeous art at the end of the fic! I know you've already heard me gushing and screaming in your DMs but OHMYFUCKINGGOD it is so good. I am in love with what you drew for me. It fits the story and the character's personality so well. All I want to do is stare at your art all day long. Thank you so much 💖💖💖

The art for this fic was made through a collaboration as part of **Fandom Trumps Hate**, a fanwork auction supporting progressive nonprofits. You can find out more about them HERE!

Fic by lumosatnight
Art by kairrenart

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: Wicked Red

All you have is your fire
And the place you need to reach
Don't you ever tame your demons
But always keep 'em on a leash

Wicked reds, ghastly oranges, haunting blues, savage yellows.

The flames lick along my body. They caress my tender skin, so gentle, like a lover after nightfall, like a naive breeze during spring. They lap pleasantly at my heels, a dog obediently awaiting its master's call.

But I am not its master.

The flames have no master, a lesson learned through irrevocable mistake, but they do have a creator.

Tell me, then. Who is your creator?

The phoenix dies in flame and is born in ash. What will I find in your ashes? The gates of hell are marked by craters of searing fire, scorching anyone who wanders near. If I get too close, will you scorch me too? The cure for wickedness is to burn from the outside in, cleanse the soul until there is nothing left but forgiveness. If I let you burn me, will you forgive me too?

The flames lick along the wall, climbing the trellises until they reach the sky, scouring the path until there is not a pebble left unblackened.

I should be afraid. I should be disgusted.

Screams echo around us, bleeding into the billows of smoke and getting carried away into the night. All I feel is heat—your heat—trapping me as I am, branding me in place. You take a deep breath and then you are rising higher, burning brighter.

I should contain you. I should stop you.

What if I do not want to?

The falcon soared through the open window, casting a harsh white light across the messy bedroom and the occupants of the rumpled bed.

"POTTER!" the falcon barked. "You're needed on duty. Report to the Apparition point in Shepherd's Bush immediately and grab the extra presets for St Mungos while you're at it.

We've got another arson case and it's not looking good."

With a flash of light, the falcon vanished, Head Auror Robards's voice fading with it.

In the room's sudden silence, Harry threw off the blanket and swung his legs over the side of the bed, the cold tile leeching away his grogginess through the soles of his feet.

"Wha' time s'it?" The other occupant of the bed stirred.

Harry glanced at the alarm clock, its numbers a bright red. "Just past four."

"Christ." Harry's guest rolled over and groaned into the empty space that Harry's sleeping body had just occupied. "When they said going home with the Chosen One had its downsides, they never mentioned being woken up at four in the bloody morning."

"Who said?" Harry asked distractedly. He crooked a finger and his Auror robes came soaring in from downstairs where he had discarded them after stumbling in high as a hippogriff through the Floo.

"Oh, you know how people talk. And Witch Weekly is always going on about it. Did you really sleep with every player on the Holyhead Harpies? Because I must say that's quite the impressive feat…" Harry's guest rambled on, but Harry ignored him, getting up from the bed and slipping his heavy robes on. With another flick of his hand, the top drawer of the desk unlocked and items flew towards him. A battered watch settled on his wrist, and a collection of 'Welcome to London!' keychains floated into his hand.

Harry patted the pockets of his robes and frowned. "Hey. Jonathan, right? Have you seen my glasses?"

Harry's guest—possibly named Jonathon—spluttered. "I—uh, what?"

"Have… you seen… my glasses?" repeated Harry. He would summon the blasted things, but they had been charmed to prevent someone else from doing exactly that. Better to dig around his bedroom every morning than be left blind in a critical duel.

"No, I haven't seen your—"

"Have you checked under the pillow?"

"No, I bloody just woke up. I haven't had time to look under the—"

"Check it, would you?"

There was a huff and then a rustling sound, but Harry wasn't paying attention. He counted the keychains in his hand, carefully reaching out to feel the quiet hum of magic surrounding them. Satisfied, Harry dropped them in his pocket and returned his attention to locating his damn glasses. He would put a tracking charm on them, but then it would be far too easy for people to track *him.* Whether it be Robards or Hermione, he certainly didn't need that extra complication in his life.

“Here. Take your bloody glasses.”

A blurry object came hurling at Harry through the dark. He raised a lazy hand and the object came to a standstill, hovering serenely in front of him.

“And my name is Aaron, not Jonathon,” grumbled Harry’s guest.

“Great. Cheers, Aaron-not-Jonathon.” Harry plucked his glasses from mid-air, waved them carelessly in the direction of the bed, and popped them on his face. Ah, that was much better. Only one thing left to do now.

“Well, Aaron-not-Jonathon,” he said, “looks like it’s time for you to go.”

“WHAT?” His guest spluttered again, and this time Harry could see that he was wearing a very unpleasant expression. “You’re kicking me out? It’s four in the bloody morning!”

“It is,” agreed Harry. He checked his watch. Godric, this was taking a while. Robards was not going to be happy when he finally showed up. “And I suggest you leave now while I’m still asking nicely.”

“Or you’ll what?” Harry’s guest, who was becoming more unwelcome by the second, snorted. “You’ll call the Aurors on me?”

“Or, I’ll leave you bound and naked on the steps of St Mungos.”

A scoff. “No, you wouldn’t. You’re Harry Potter. That wouldn’t be very heroic, now would it?”

Harry reached into his pocket, retrieving one of the plastic keychains. He whipped it at his guest’s head and it made a satisfying thunking sound upon making contact.

“Ow! What the hell?” He held up the keychain, glaring at the cause of his new headache. “What *is* this?”

“A souvenir,” said Harry, “for fucking the Chosen One.” He swept his hand in a low arc and watched as long black ropes materialised and wound their way around the body in the bed.

“What’re you doing? What the fuck? Let me go!”

Harry clenched his hand into a fist and the ropes tightened, a few slytherin up to wind around his head and acting as a gag. No amount of squirming or moaning would help now.

“Have a nice trip, Aaron-not-Jonathon,” Harry said flatly, and then, *“Hephaestus.”*

The keychain glowed, the preset Portkey activating, and the bed was finally empty.

Harry grabbed his wand and Disapparated.

🔥

Ron stomped into the Auror office, peeling off his robes and throwing them onto his chair. A flurry of ash fell to the just-cleaned floor and covered the papers on Ron's desk in specks of grey. Across the hall, the morning caretaker scowled in their direction. Ron gave him a sheepish grin.

It was just nearing seven o'clock; Harry and Ron and the rest of the Aurors, unlucky enough to be on duty that Saturday night—or rather Sunday morning—were slowly trickling in. Susan Bones had snuck away for a quick kip in the lounge, while Cassius Warrington had grabbed the nearest pen and Apparated home as soon as the discharge papers had been signed —too much smoke inhalation qualified for at least a half day's rest. The remainder of their motley crew—including a fuming Head Auror Robards, shaken Padma Patil, and zombie-like Lavender Brown—headed immediately for the espresso machine at the end of the hall. Harry, however, hated the taste of coffee and kept a stash of Pepper-Up Potion in his desk instead.

"They're a bloody lunatic," Ron groaned, wiping the ashes off his desk and effectively smearing them farther into the papers.

"Maybe," said Harry, throwing back a bottle of Pepper-Up and then another.

"Don't get me wrong. Fucking brilliant. Haven't been able to make heads or tails of them yet, but absolutely bonkers. Who sets an entire block of flats on fire? And a block of *Muggle* flats at that." Ron leaned back in his chair, sending more ashes swirling towards the ground.

"MEETING. FIFTEEN MINUTES," Robards barked, sweeping past, fresh cup of coffee in hand, before slamming the door to his office.

"Well, he's in a right tizzy," said Ron.

"And you wouldn't be, if you were in his position?" Lavender perched on the edge of Ron's desk, passing a cup over to Ron.

"At least no one died," said Harry, ducking out of the path of steaming hot liquid.

"Not this time," replied Ron, eagerly taking the cup. "Thanks, love," he added, seemingly as an afterthought. He brought the cup up and inhaled half of it in one gulp.

Lavender smiled as Ron reemerged coughing. Padma came up behind him and patted him vigorously on the back.

"Honestly, Ron. Do you ever learn?"

"Apparently not." Ron continued coughing into his sleeve. Lavender rolled her eyes and unsheathed her wand, giving it a small flick. Ron's coughing ceased. "Ahh, thanks," he said, sending her a crooked grin.

"You two are disgustingly cute." Padma wrinkled her nose. "My eyes are practically bleeding from the cuteness."

"I learned to keep them closed around these two ages ago," said Harry, doing just that.

A sharp kick to his chair forced his eyes open again.

Robards was standing in front of them, red robes still covered in ash, face glowering. “Potter. Patil. My office. Now,” he said, immediately stomping away.

Harry exchanged a glance with Padma and quickly rose from his desk.

“That doesn’t sound good,” he heard Ron mutter to Lavender behind them.

Robards’s office was in a state: old coffee cups littered the floor, papers scattered across every surface, takeaway containers stacked in the corners, ashy clothing hung from the walls. Robards was leaning over his desk, squinting at a letter in his hands.

“Sit,” he said, not looking up as Harry closed the office door.

For several long moments, Harry and Padma sat in silence while Robards glared at the letter.

“Sir…” Harry said, when he was about to squirm out of his chair from impatience.

Padma nudged him in the side, and he cut himself off.

Eventually, Robards set down the letter and peered at them across his massive desk.

“If you know anything about the Wand, speak up now. If I find out you’ve withheld information, not even your being top of the department will stop me from arresting you.”

“The wand?” said Harry. “What wand?” He glanced at Padma who looked just as confused as he was, her black brows knitted together.

“The Hawthorn wand, unicorn hair core, ten inches, reasonably springy. Sound familiar, Potter?” Robards voice was mocking.

“But, sir.” To Harry’s relief, Robards turned his piercing stare on Padma. “Isn’t the Wand locked away in the museum?”

“Not anymore,” said Robards, waving the letter in front of him. “It’s missing.”

Padma gasped.

“Since when?” asked Harry, frowning.

“Intern on nightshift noticed a crack in the glass case a few hours ago. Found a fake inside. Could’ve been replaced months ago and no one noticed until now.” He scrutinised Harry again. “And I know you were originally against putting the Wand in that Order of the Phoenix exhibit.”

“Well, yeah,” said Harry, sitting a bit taller. “It only made sense to return it to its owner, or at least hide it elsewhere. But I’m not an idiot. I didn’t steal it.”

“Let’s hope so,” Robards muttered, sliding the letter into a drawer and locking it with a click. “I’m going to need you both on surveillance until we can recover the Wand.”

“Wait, surveillance? What about the arson case?”

“Brown and Weasley have it covered,” Robards answered brusquely. “You’ll still be called in for emergencies, of course.”

“But, sir—”

“No ‘buts,’ Potter.” Harry huffed and crossed his arms, slumping back in his chair.

Padma gave his shoulder a light squeeze and said, “Who will we be tailing, sir?”

Robards flopped a set of manilla folders on the desk in front of them. The one in front of Padma splayed open to a moving photograph of Pansy Parkinson glancing over her shoulder as she climbed the white steps of the British Museum , light from the glass ceiling glinting off the giant emeralds hanging from her ears. Harry’s folder fell open to reveal Draco Malfoy, seated at the museum cafe, his blonde head thrown back in raucous laughter.

“Photos were taken a few months back. Both were spotted at the museum around the time we believe the Wand was taken.” Robards slid the folders closer. Malfoy cackled at Harry from the crinkled page. In the photo, he looked sickly thin, sharp angles sticking out and bony edges gritting together.

Harry hated the smile on Malfoy’s face—one of such pure joy, of such abandonment. He may have talked at Malfoy’s trial all those years ago, but that didn’t mean Malfoy deserved to be happy after all he had done, after all the lives his side had cost. Heat boiled in Harry’s veins, blood rushing to his ears.

“Harry.” Padma waved the folder in front of his face. “You alright?”

“Yeah. Fine,” said Harry tightly, grabbing the folder. “Is that all, sir?”

Robards was watching him closely, eyes narrowed.

“Go wake Bones for the meeting,” he said and gave them a dismissive wave.

“Yes, sir.” Padma gripped Harry firmly by the arm and steered him out of the office.

“You sure you’re alright?” she said, releasing him.

“Just fabulous,” said Harry.

“Alright…” She laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. Being partnered with Padma, he usually welcomed her friendly, comforting touches, but right now, with the anger still rolling through him, he tried not to flinch under her hand. “But let me know if you need anything. We could switch if that’d be easier. Doesn’t make a difference to me, following one suspect or the other —”

“No, it’s fine. I’ll handle it.” Harry sidestepped Padma, her hand falling from his shoulder.

“Okay,” she said, and Harry heard her retreating footsteps as she went to look for Susan in the lounge.

“Tough one, mate.” Ron sauntered by, arm slung around Lavender’s waist. They both were a bit pink in the cheeks, their lips more swollen than usual. “But knowing your luck, even on surveillance, you’ll probably stumble upon the arsonist and crack the case before any of us.”

“Yeah, just my luck,” grumbled Harry, running a hand through his hair. He wondered if he pulled hard enough if he would eventually go bald.

🔥

Surveillance was about as boring as it sounded.

Obviously if Malfoy had stolen the Wand, he wouldn’t be stupid enough to go running around using it. Malfoy was a lot of things, but he was not stupid. That, at least, Harry knew.

The last time Harry had seen Malfoy, it had been an ordinary day at the Ministry, Harry trudging in from yet another unsatisfactory night out on the pull. Malfoy and his bony elbows had bumped into him in the Ministry atrium on his way to the lifts. Harry had been so surprised he had dropped his wand. “Here.” Malfoy had handed it back, barely sparing Harry a glance.

And that had been it. No hostile sneers, no scalding insults. Harry had continued on with his day normally, content in ignoring the last-luster interaction.

Fast forward a couple months, and Harry could do anything but ignore Malfoy. Quite literally, since his new job was to verifiably *stalk* him.

Harry spent the week hiding behind bushes, slouching down alleyways, and pretending to read newspapers on park benches. It was completely and utterly ridiculous, not to mention the truly hideous disguises. Harry didn’t think that wearing a smelly hat covered solely in owl feathers should ever count as a disguise, but Robards apparently did. At least Ron had had a good laugh at it.

Following Malfoy was mind-meltingly boring because he did absolutely bloody nothing. He arrived by Floo to the Ministry atrium at exactly half past seven—always the second grate from the end. At promptly seven forty-five, he was standing in line at the ridiculously priced cafe around the corner, counting out knuts to buy the same poncy cup of tea. At precisely eight, he was seated at his cramped desk down in filing, where he would stay for the rest of the day, not even taking a break for lunch or to use the loo. Then, at five on the dot, at the chime of the clock, he gathered his measly things, swung on his long dark coat and Flooed to Malfoy Manor for dinner with his mother—again, using the second grate from the end. By eight sharp, he returned to his flat where Harry would huddle outside waiting for any sign of movement until the lights in the window dimmed at just before ten. Come the next morning, Malfoy would rise at exactly six to repeat the entire boring day over again.

As far as Harry could tell, Malfoy's life was supremely uninteresting—no other outside activities, no stops at the market on the way home, no popping over to a lover's flat for a mid-week tryst. The only possibly interesting activity Malfoy did was a weekly trip to Diagon Alley to pick up more Sleeping Draught—Harry had snuck the receipts from his pocket to discover that—and his occasional venture into a measly pub, only to sit alone at the bar and stare stoically into space.

Malfoy's life was truly and utterly dull.

Which was immediately suspicious, but Harry had yet to find any evidence to back up his claims.

So, after a week of following Malfoy's every move and finding nothing of importance, Harry decided on a plan. He checked his glamour in the mirror one last time. A wrinkled old man stared back at him, grey hair covering the scar on his forehead, body hidden away beneath layers of bulky robes, green eyes charmed a muddy brown.

Apparating into an empty alley, he poked his head around the corner and waited for Malfoy's slicked-back head to appear for his Thursday evening potions pick-up.

The sun was starting to set, and Harry's stomach gurgled at his lack of foresight of not packing any snacks. Just as he was about to give up the endeavour and try again next week, the crowd parted and he spotted a pointed chin raised high in the air.

Harry hobbled into the walkway.

And walked straight into Malfoy.

Malfoy stumbled, losing his footing, and landed flat on his arse on the cold cobblestone. The package he was holding gave a loud clunk and rolled off to the side.

"Oh, apologies lad. Didn't see you there. My eyes are starting to betray me, see."

"It's fine," Malfoy said, retrieving his package and climbing to his feet. He brushed a fleck of dirt from his sleeve. Up close, Malfoy was even thinner—his cheekbones were gaunt and hands almost skeletal, deep purple bags under his eyes. Harry wondered what had happened to make him look like that.

Whatever it was, he probably deserved it, the wanker.

"Mind helping me over to that bench over there? My knees aren't what they used to be."

Malfoy looked at him coolly, his grey eyes flashing in the lamplight. "Of course," he responded finally, extending a robed arm.

Harry latched onto it, pretending to wobble on the uneven path, and allowed Malfoy to guide him the few metres to the nearest bench. Even through his robes, Malfoy's arm was thin—too thin.

In fact, Harry had barely seen Malfoy put anything past his lips these past few days. He barely drank; he barely ate. Must be barely sleeping too. What was he living on? The tortured screams of classmates past?

Malfoy stood stiffly as Harry settled himself on the bench.

“Don’t go getting old,” he said. “It ain’t nothing like they say it’s gonna be. ‘Wiser with age’ or some other bollocks. All I’ve gotten is a wonky leg and grey hair.” He let out an exaggerated groan. “Well, and the kids. But they ain’t kids anymore, are they? Taller than me, they are, and with their own little ones now too.” He leaned closer to Malfoy. “Take my advice: Don’t have kids. Too much work, and then after all that, they up and leave with no goodbye for their old man. They ain’t worth it, none of them.”

“I’ll… keep that in mind.” Malfoy glanced around the crowded street, his hand fidgeting on his sleeve.

“Well, and what about you then, a young chap like you? Bet you already got a pretty missus waiting at home.”

“No,” Malfoy said shortly. “I’m gay.”

And, well, that threw Harry for a loop. He’d always suspected, of course—Malfoy’s hair was always just a little *too* slick, and he always used to stand just a little *too* close to Zabini during potions—but he didn’t expect Malfoy to confirm it here and now, to a random old man on the side of the road.

“A-Ah,” said Harry. “You got a pretty bloke then? You seem like a fella who’d prefer the pretty ones.”

Malfoy stared down at him, his face unreadable. Was Harry being too obvious? He *was* laying the accent on a little thick.

“Will you be requiring any more assistance this evening?” Malfoy said finally.

“Oh no! I’m all set. Just going to stay here, give the ol’ leg a break—”

“A word of advice…” Malfoy leaned closer, his breath a warm puff in Harry’s ear. “If you’re pretending to be an old man, don’t go around asking people about their sexual preferences. It’s uncouth.”

He leaned back, Harry catching his eyes for the briefest moment. There was a gleam there that Harry was sure had not been there before.

“Have a good night, Potter.” Malfoy sneered then strode away, disappearing into the crowd and leaving a swirl of misplaced air in his wake.

Harry was hit by Malfoy’s familiar scent—the woodsy cologne he’d started wearing back in year three, the sharp sting of his hair gel, the expensive press of his neatly lined robes. But there was a new smell now, one that Harry was embarrassed to note he had not noticed earlier, too preoccupied maintaining his terrible facade.

Malfoy smelled like smoke.

Harry got the call a few hours later.

Since Malfoy's abrupt departure, Harry had been sulking on the bench in Diagon Alley, staring straight into the waning streetlight and contemplating his life choices. Robards's falcon flew in and perched on Harry's knee. "Hogsmeade. URGENT," it said in Robards's gruff voice, and then disappeared in a flash of light.

Groaning, Harry felt around in his pocket for his wand and Disapparated.

Harry landed in the middle of Hogsmeade, the entire village in chaos. Wixen ran from collapsing buildings, screaming and clutching valuables to their chests. Billows of smoke curled up into the dark sky, acrid and grey. Buildings were swallowed in flames, wickedly red with huge, gaping mouths.

Harry stalked forward, wand held steadily in front of him. There was a crowd gathered around J. Pippin's Potions Shop, their anxious faces cast in flickering shadow.

"Get back! Everyone stay back!" he heard Lavender's shrill voice exclaim. The hovering crowd remained unmoved. There was a loud blast, and suddenly, yelling bodies were falling to the ground, pushed outward by some unseen force. Ron stood towering above them, his face like stone, his hair the same colour as the flames behind him. And, Harry thought, he had never looked more powerful; he looked like someone who could control the flames.

Pushing through screaming bodies and clutching hands, Harry made his way through the crowd.

Ron raised his wand as he approached. "Sir, this area is off limits."

"Ron, mate, it's me."

"Harry?" Ron's wand wavered, before steadying once again. "Where were we when we destroyed Slytherin's locket for good?"

"Bloody freezing our arses off by some lake in the Forest of Dean," answered Harry, not flinching under Ron's wand.

"Harry! Thank Godric." Ron threw himself at Harry, giving him a brief hug. "There's a group trapped inside. Robards's gone to fetch them. He made Lav and I keep watch. We're to wait for backup before trying to put out the flames."

"Where's Padma?" Harry scanned the area, throwing a Shielding Charm at an unsuspecting villager huddling under a falling awning and blasting a chunk of debris away from a wailing family.

"She's…" Ron paused, and Harry allowed a quick glance at his pinched expression.

“She took the day off,” said Lavender, jerking her wand in a zigzag motion and creating a blue bubble of clean air as Honeydukes exploded next to them in a flurry of flames. She lowered her wand and said, “It’s their— *her* birthday today. You know how hard it is for her.” She turned her head away, eyes wet.

Though it had been many years since that terrible battle, so many years since Voldemort roamed the grounds of Hogwarts and turned them into a battlefield, Harry knew that Lavender had never forgiven herself for Parvati’s fate. So many lives had been lost; so many lives had been saved. Some had been traded for another. Some had never been given a chance.

He thought of Fred, so vibrant and full of life, his laughter silenced forever. He thought of Parvati, at the very beginning of her life, throwing herself in Greyback’s path to save her best friend. He thought of Draco Malfoy, walking free, leaving the castle alive while so many others lay rotting in the ground.

And suddenly he was furious. Furious at the unfairness of dying, the guilt of staying alive, the helplessness clutching at his chest.

He swept his wand in front of him, clearing a path through the flames, the familiar flames.

“Harry, no!” Ron shouted, running towards him, but with another sweep, the fire closed in around him. Harry took a deep breath and, as if in response, the flames rose higher, obscuring Ron from view.

Harry took a step forward.

Towards the crumbling shop with victims in need of saving.

Towards the burning light that called to Harry even in his dreams.

Towards the forgiveness that he craved so deeply.

Harry walked forward, the flames parting around him.

🔥

In the end, Harry saved them (because of course he did).

He had barely ushered the shop owners and coughing clerk out of the flames when the building had collapsed in a shower of sparks, the once impressive stone structure crumbling to the ground in a pitious heap.

Head Auror Robards clung to Harry’s shoulder, his limping body a heavy weight at Harry’s side.

The Entrapment Charms had been strong, but Harry had been stronger—dismantling them piece by piece, one by one, until a hole had appeared in the latticework, a hole just big enough for them to crawl through and escape outside.

As the village rushed around them, Healers' and Aurors' and family members' frantic screams filling the night, Harry caught a flash of white in the crowd.

A pointed chin, raised high in the air.

Chapter 2: Ghastly Orange 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"We need to do *something!"* Harry yelled over the large conference table. "Why haven't we arrested anyone? Where are our suspects? How long are we going to continue sitting on our arses and not do anything?"

Beside him, Ron shifted uncomfortably in his seat and avoided eye contact. Padma was fiddling with her long braid, a disapproving scowl on her face. Lavender was sipping from her third cup of coffee, pretending to scribble something in her notepad. Susan and Cassius had been transferred to the illegal potions case just days before, so their spots were empty.

Across the table, Kingsley Shacklebolt, current Minister of Magic and usually someone Harry greatly respected, let out a weary sigh.

"Calm down, Potter. We're doing all that we can, but whoever is behind this has been very careful with covering their tracks. It was difficult enough obtaining the little information we do have."

"Oh, and what is that exactly?" Harry scoffed. "Barely anything."

"Harry, stop." Hermione, newly appointed Undersecretary to the Minister, reached over and tried to take his hand. Her brown eyes were kind, sympathetic. Harry hated when she looked at him like that, as if he were an unruly toddler who needed coddling. "The arsonist is very meticulous. They've left no clues, no loose ends. They seem to be knowledgeable with what they're doing. All of the fires we've been called to, we only know about because they *wanted* us to find them."

"I'm sorry, Harry," Kingsley said, his voice much softer than before, which somehow made everything worse. "There isn't much we can do, I'm afraid. All we can do is wait until the next attack and hope we can get there sooner to—"

"PEOPLE ALMOST DIED!" Harry shouted so loudly Lavender was startled into spilling her coffee. "And you're saying that all we can do is sit around and *wait?* We should be searching the area again! We should be questioning anyone who was there! And what about *Malfoy?* He was at the scene. I saw him there in Hogsmeade." He was on his feet, blood rushing to his ears, hands clenched on the tabletop. He didn't understand how someone as ruthless, as single-minded as Kingsley could simply ignore something like this.

"Potter, sit down!" Robards shifted in his chair, wincing as the cast on his leg bumped into the table.

He had made it out alive due to Harry's fortunate timing, but the entire right side of his body would be scarred for life and the Healers at St Mungos had yet to determine if his limp would be permanent.

"I'm the one who almost died," he said grimly. "And this is *my* department with *my* staff who I'm putting in danger, so why don't you let *me* handle these decisions? Hmm?"

"But, sir—"

"Harry, he's right." Hermione gripped his hand tightly, not allowing him to squirm away. "These things take time, but we'll find whoever's behind this. We've already scoured the affected areas and interviewed anyone left at the scene. We've done all we can."

"But what about Malf—"

"Keep tailing him," said Robards. "If he does anything else suspicious, report it directly to me. *Do not make contact.* If he does turn out to be a suspect, *then and only then* can you apprehend him. Do you hear me, Potter?"

"Yes, sir," Harry said through gritted teeth. He stood from the table and left the conference room in a huff.

Robards frowned at Harry's retreating back.

🔥

Pub night was a disaster.

Normally, Harry took this opportunity to chat up someone at the bar and whisk them back to his place for a night of nameless fucking. Usually an easy "Hey, I'm Harry Potter," and volunteers would be falling in his lap, sometimes multiple at once.

But tonight, he wasn't in the mood. He tossed back another shot, slamming the glass down harder than necessary.

"Blimey, Harry, slow down. We've got all night." Across the booth, Ron sipped from his pint, shoulder pressed tightly against Lavender's. Lavender was swirling some frilly-looking drink with too many orange slices floating on top. Harry knew that by the end of the night, Ron would end up with the pink drink in his hand and Lavender would be the one chugging pints. They just liked to keep up pretences—some weird form of foreplay.

"Do you think Hermione's coming tonight?" Lavender asked eagerly. After being reassured that Hermione had "absolutely no intention" of winning back Ron's affections as she'd "rather take an Avada Kedavra to the face," the two witches had become the bestest of friends. No one knew more embarrassing stories of Ron than his best friend turned ex-girlfriend returned best friend and his current girlfriend.

"Dunno." Ron grimaced around a sip of beer. "Here, let me try yours." He passed his drink over to Lavender.

Harry sighed and slumped into the booth. This was going to be a long night. Maybe he should just call it early, go home and throw a Quaffle around until the restless energy buzzing through him since this afternoon's meeting dissipated.

He was highly considering doing just that, trying to ignore Ron and Lavender's increasingly gooey exclamations across the table, when there was a flash of white from across the room.

Squinting through the crowd, Harry saw Draco Malfoy, pointed chin and all, leave his space at the bar and weave his way toward the loos.

"Toilet," Harry said, eyes pinned on Malfoy's blonde head. "Might be a while."

Ron detached himself from Lavender's face long enough to roll his eyes at Harry. "Going to ditch us again?" he joked. "I swear. Everytime. You're going to run out of people to take home at this point."

"Nah." Harry threw back another shot. "There's always you. Haven't managed to take you home yet." He winked.

Harry slid out of the booth as Ron spluttered and Lavender laughed. He rooted around in his cloak for his wand.

Malfoy was slouched against the hallway wall, bored expression on his pointy face, waiting for his turn to relieve himself. Harry snuck up behind the next occupant in line, careful to keep out of Malfoy's direct eyesight.

On Malfoy's turn, Harry crept forward and launched himself at the door, just catching it before it swung closed.

"Oi, wait your turn!" complained the other bloke in line, but Harry ignored him as he barged through the door, grabbing Malfoy around one bony wrist and spinning him around. Malfoy didn't even have time to reach for his wand.

"Gads, Potter. Get your grubby hands off me."

"Tell me. Where were you Thursday night?" Harry slammed Malfoy into the bathroom wall, his wand aimed at Malfoy's throat.

"Really now, darling. If you wanted to get me alone, all you had to do was ask," Malfoy rasped.

"I'm going to ask you one more time, Malfoy. Where were you?"

Malfoy's thin lips curled into a smirk. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Malfoy didn't look scared or worried or remorseful. He looked haughty and snide and as slick as ever. Harry absolutely hated it. He hated Malfoy with a fury. Malfoy didn't deserve to look like that. Malfoy didn't deserve *anything.*

"People almost died," Harry hissed, stepping closer, their bodies almost flush.

"Pity," said Malfoy coolly. "But they didn't, did they? Because the great Saviour Harry Potter was there to save them. How fucking fortunate."

Pure seering anger washed over him, blurring his vision and radiating out in waves. The tiles might have been shaking or it could have been Harry himself vibrating with rage. Anyone else would have cowered back under the dark cloud of his hate, Harry's wand sparking at their throat, but Malfoy merely sneered.

"It should have been you," Harry growled, shoving forward and pinning Malfoy to the wall with his body instead of his wand. He spat right onto Malfoy's face which had gone an alarming shade of scarlet. "You should have died in that fire."

Harry wasn't talking about the fire in Hogsmeade anymore, and they both knew it.

"Potter, what're you—get off me, you bastard!"

Malfoy struggled in Harry's hold, but Harry only flung a forearm across Malfoy's emaciated ribcage and crushed him further into the wall. He could feel each beat of Malfoy's galloping heart as he pressed their bodies together.

"You don't deserve to live. Admit it. You're scum—worthless."

"Potter, I—"

"Say it." He pressed harder, cutting off some of Malfoy's windpipe, and Malfoy made a sound similar to a drowning animal.

"I… I…" Malfoy looked to the ground, licked his lips.

"Look at me, Malfoy."

Malfoy's head snapped up. His eyes were the colour of smoke, swirling and opaque.

"Say it, or I'll hex your tongue off right here, right now." And Harry would. He would even *relish* doing it.

"I don't deserve to live," Malfoy mumbled, barely audible, his hands clutching uselessly at Harry's arm.

"Say you should have died. Say it's all your fault."

"I… I… Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Y-Yes," Malfoy stuttered in a rush. His eyes were wide as saucers, black pupils dilated against the grey. "It was my idea—all my fault. It should have been me. If I hadn't gone off on my own then Greg wouldn't… and then Vince wouldn't have… I should have stopped them… I could have stopped the fire… if I had only…"

"That's enough."

The smell of smoke swirled around them, its acrid taste burning Harry's nostrils and lingering in his throat. He didn't know if it was the memory of it or the smell itself coming from Malfoy, but it was suffocating enough that he released Malfoy's throat and took a step back.

As Harry removed his arm, he noticed the way Malfoy leaned into his touch even when it was strangling him.

Interesting.

"So you admit it then?" Harry said mockingly. "That you're Death Eater scum. Useless. Worthless."

He watched the way red splotches bloomed across Malfoy's sharp cheekbones at the words. He revelled in the way Malfoy's breath pulsed quick and hot across the scant inches between them. He felt more than saw the way Malfoy's entire body shuddered when he let his eyes roam lower, over Malfoy's tight shirt and even tighter trousers.

"I—" Malfoy inhaled sharply as Harry took a step closer, crowding Malfoy against the wall once again. "Y-Yes. *Hnnh,* yes."

"Are you sure?" Harry taunted. "You don't sound too sure that you're a worthless piece of shit." He pressed a knee between Malfoy's legs, trapping his hips with nowhere to escape. He didn't even need his wand for this; with a crook of his fingers, black ropes wound around Malfoy's thin wrists and tugged them above his head.

Malfoy gasped, his response coming faster, more breathless. "Yes. Yes. I'm worthless. A waste of air."

"Are you absolutely sure?" He pressed his knee in harder, shifted it higher, and felt the proof of Malfoy's arousal growing against his thigh.

"Yes. Yes, Potter. Yes. Oh. *Oh."*

Malfoy was practically *panting.* He was so willing, so eager—like a bitch in heat. But oh, how Harry loved it. How he loved seeing Malfoy this way, completely at his mercy. So hard and desperate for it. Pathetic, really. Where had this side of Malfoy been before? Where was the prim and proper pureblood boy now?

"Prove it." Harry leaned over and bit hard on Malfoy's ear. He imagined he could taste Malfoy's blood, the coppery liquid spilling over his tongue—that filthy, violence-tainted blood.

"Fuck me," Malfoy said breathlessly, shivering, keening into Harry's touch. "Fuck me. Please, Potter *please."* He squirmed in the bonds Harry had conjured but didn't remove his hands from above his head, simply letting them hang there.

Harry leaned away, and Malfoy practically *whimpered.*

"Yes," said Harry, taking in the mess of a man he'd made. "I think I will."

Harry Apparated them straight to his bedroom at Grimmauld Place.

As soon as they landed, Harry shoved Malfoy away.

Malfoy landed on his back on the unmade bed, hands still bound together, and looked up at Harry with wide, pleading eyes. Harry was disgusted by them—such a cold, lifeless colour.

Harry climbed up on the bed and straddled Malfoy with his thighs. He dug his nails into Malfoy's cheek, turning his face away. He couldn't stand looking at him for too long. Malfoy hissed at the sharp scratch of Harry's blunt nails.

"Look at you…" Harry practically cooed. "All tied up with nowhere to go. You love this, don't you?"

As if to emphasise his point, Harry waved his hand and Malfoy's bound wrists flew up to attach themselves to the headboard. Malfoy moaned, the chords in his arms pulling taunt.

Harry summoned an item from across the room and placed the keychain in Malfoy's palm.

"Knock this against the headboard if you want to stop." Harry leaned down and whispered right into Malfoy's ear. "Because otherwise I won't stop. I am going to take everything from you. I am going to keep you pinned to the bed like the little slut you are and fuck you until you can't close your legs without my cum dripping out of your gaping hole. I am going to *own* you."

Malfoy whimpered, eyes scrunched shut, hands clenching the keychain so tightly his nails were starting to dig into his palm. Harry hoped they would leave marks.

Carefully, slowly, like he had all the time in the world, Harry pushed his jeans to mid-thigh and removed his cock from his pants. He started stroking it in slow, languid strokes. Malfoy watched him, eyes darkening, pink blooming across his cheekbones.

Malfoy licked his lips.

"Suck it," Harry said, leaning forward.

And Malfoy did.

He sucked it all down, all the way to the base. Malfoy was sucking him. Malfoy was *gagging* for him. Moaning for him. Begging Harry with his mouth and his tongue to go faster, harder, deeper, *more.*

"Yesss," Harry hissed. He thrust his hips forward into that tight, wet heat. "Look at you taking it. Taking my cock like you were made for it. Because you *were* made for it, weren't you? You're nothing but a slut. Worthless. Spineless. You'd do anything I told you to, wouldn't you?"

Malfoy moaned around Harry's cock, the vibration nearly tipping Harry over the edge. It was an obscene sight, Malfoy's thin lips, wet with saliva and pre-come, stretching around the width. He pushed further into Malfoy's mouth, the tip of his cock pressing against Malfoy's uvula and making him gag.

Abruptly Harry pulled away, a trail of saliva dribbling down Malfoy's chin. He yanked his pants and his trousers the rest of the way off and climbed back on top of Malfoy, this time hovering above him, his entire body ready to drop down and crush Malfoy into the mattress, his hard cock dangling in Malfoy's face.

"You know what to do," Harry said and lowered himself into Malfoy's mouth.

Malfoy squirmed, his airway cut off almost instantly. Harry glanced briefly at Malfoy's hands, but Malfoy was still clutching the keychain tightly, not giving any indication of moving it or trying to escape his bonds.

"That's it," said Harry, and then he fucked Malfoy's mouth.

And Malfoy just laid back and *took it* —and took it—and took it—and took it—Harry slamming his hips down again and again, choking Malfoy on his cock. Again and again and again.

Malfoy was just taking it, no complaints, couldn't even push him away if he wanted to. In fact, Malfoy *deserved* to take it, Harry thought. He *deserved* to be used like this. He deserved to be *ruined.*

Harry lifted himself higher, his arms straining, and thrust again into Malfoy's open, waiting mouth. Hot and wet and messy. Those poisonous lips parting around Harry's cock. And gods, what Malfoy was doing with his tongue and his *throat* was nearly unbearable . Any lesser man would have come long before now.

It was hot. It was filthy. It was bloody *fantastic.*

Harry had never felt so absolutely free, so absolutely in control. He didn't have to worry about Malfoy liking it. He *knew* Malfoy liked it. Hell, Malfoy *loved* it. He could feel Malfoy's cock steadily growing harder beneath him, his body arching closer to Harry everytime he slammed in again, pounding into that slack, panting mouth.

Harry had never fucked *anyone* like this before.

Malfoy whimpered deep in his throat. And my gods, did the man have any gag reflex at all? There were tears spilling from the corner of his eyes, making them look all wide and glassy, more luminous than their usual grey. Soon the tears would reach the bedsheets, soaking them through. Harry *wanted* them to soak through. Harry *wanted* to see Malfoy crying for it, desperate for it.

"Fuck," Harry gasped. And then he was coming, pulling his cock from Malfoy's mouth with an obscene squelch, and watching his cum splatter across Malfoy's face. Sticking to his

eyelashes, smearing across his gaunt cheekbones, landing in his slicked-back hair. Well, it wasn't so slicked back anymore after Harry's manhandling.

"Nnngh. Uhh. Uhhh." There was so much of it. He wasn't stopping. It just kept coming, just kept coming, pumping out of him in an endless white stream onto Malfoy. Malfoy who had his eyes closed, mouth lolling open, pink tongue hanging out. Just waiting for it, like a fucking whore, like he wanted nothing more than to be pinned to Harry's bed waiting to be used.

It was, Merlin, it was too much. It was not enough. It would never be enough.

The last drop spilled from Harry's cock and onto Malfoy's waiting tongue. And then Malfoy was making these low mewling sounds, hips jerking sporadically like he was about to come too.

"I don't think so." Harry reached down and gripped the base of Malfoy's cock, tight enough to cut off the circulation. "You don't get to come yet. Not until I say you can."

And Malfoy *writhed.* Back bowing against the bed, face flushed and sweaty with Harry's cum still smeared across it. Malfoy's hips jerked, aching for friction, but Harry refused to loosen his hold.

Instead, he slapped Malfoy hard across the face.

"I *said,* not yet."

Malfoy whimpered, increasingly desperate noises escaping his mouth, but his hips stilled. His face warmed, and Harry saw the faint outline of a red handprint merging into view.

"Fuck," Harry groaned, "look at you. You're fucking aching for it. Nothing but a hole for me to use. I could keep you here forever, all laid out on my bed. Ready. Waiting for me. You'd like that, wouldn't you? You'd like being my own personal fucktoy."

Malfoy didn't respond, his eyes closed, breathing shallow.

"Answer me, Malfoy." Harry grabbed him by the back of his hair, pulled hard enough that he felt a few strands come loose when Malfoy arched against him. "I *said,* you'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Malfoy gasped, panted, strained against Harry's tight grip. "Y-Yes."

"That's what I thought," said Harry, releasing him.

"P-Please, Potter." Malfoy's eyes snapped open. They were nearly swallowed by black—as black as the ashes left in the wake of the fire in Hogsmeade. "Potter, I can't—I *need* —"

"Need what, Malfoy? Say it."

"I need to come. *Please."*

“Hmm,” said Harry, pulling away and trailing the blunt edge of his nails against Malfoy’s scalp. “Maybe I’ll let you. Maybe I won’t.”

He stood from the bed and moved to the corner to put his clothes away. It was fortunate that he had remembered to take his trousers off. He didn’t feel like having to scrub his cum out of them yet again.

“Potter!” Malfoy sounded panicked, hands pulling against the bonds, but he still didn’t tap the keychain to be released.

“Yes?” Harry said pleasantly.

“Potter, you bastard. You can’t just leave me like this.”

Harry raised an eyebrow at him, and Malfoy sneered. And that was enough for Harry. Because how dare Malfoy talk back to him when *he* was the one tied to Harry’s bed. When *he* was the one completely at Harry’s mercy.

With a flick of his hand, Malfoy’s clothes vanished. He didn’t care that Malfoy’s shirt had probably cost more than his last few paychecks combined. He didn’t care that Malfoy would have nothing to wear home in the morning.

Malfoy shivered as the cold air brushed his newly exposed skin. His mouth hung open as he inhaled a sharp breath.

On Malfoy’s bony rib cage a tattoo of a phoenix glistened, surrounded by a ring of fire. Harry found it surprising, not because he didn’t think Malfoy would stoop so low as to leave a permanent mark on his skin (he had a Dark Mark for Circe’s sake) but because Harry knew what phoenixes meant: resurrection, renewal, rebirth. Malfoy didn’t deserve that after all he had done, all the hurt he had caused. Why should he get a new beginning when so many others could not? *When the others were dead,* Harry’s mind supplied.

“Turn over,” Harry ordered.

Malfoy stared at him for a moment, but then silently complied, sticking his arse in the air, simply waiting. Naked and compliant.

Harry summoned the lube from the bedside table and climbed up behind him.

“I’m going to fuck you until you scream,” he said, setting a hand on the last vertebrae of Malfoy’s bony spine.

“Do it,” said Malfoy, but he didn’t sound cocky (snide, sure); he just sounded desperate (panting, *pleading).* His shoulders slumped further into the mattress, his legs spreading wider.

So, Harry did just that.

The next morning, Harry woke alone, the bed beside him cold, the sheets smelling like smoke.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 3: Ghastly Orange 2

Harry wished he could say that fucking Malfoy was only a one time lapse in acceptable judgement.

Unfortunately, that would be untrue. In fact, the entire next week Harry wondered where his judgement had run off to because it was nowhere to be seen.

It must have been having a nice lie in when he shoved Malfoy against the wall in a deserted hall of the Ministry on Monday morning and sucked on his neck so hard there was a purple mark visible for days.

It must have been taking a coffee break when he pulled Malfoy into an empty supply closet on Tuesday afternoon and pushed him to his knees.

Harry's better judgement was most certainly on holiday when he cornered Malfoy at his tiny desk in the basement of the Ministry on Wednesday after spotting him leaving the Minister's office.

"What did Kingsley want?" Harry said, nails scratching the sensitive skin of Malfoy's thigh. He had already wandlessly banished Malfoy's pants and was stroking him with harsh, fast strokes. And if Malfoy didn't have an extra set on hand to change into when they were finished, well, that wasn't Harry's problem.

"I don't know," Malfoy gasped.

Harry dug his nails harder into Malfoy's thigh causing him to groan.

"I don't know. I don't know. I misfiled the Burlington file, apparently, and it made the Minister miss a negotiation with the French Ambassador," Malfoy babbled, almost incoherently.

"Well, maybe you shouldn't fuck up next time," Harry said and bent Malfoy further over the desk.

Friday evening found Harry pressed up against Malfoy in an empty conference room on Level Two.

"Be at my place tonight," Harry said, holding up a slip of paper with the address for Grimmauld Place written on it. He slipped it into the tight pocket of Malfoy's trousers. "I'm going to the pub with Ron after work and when I get home, I want you in my bed, ready and waiting for me." Harry didn't trust Malfoy completely, but if anything was misplaced, the house would tell him.

"What time will you be home?" Malfoy licked his lips, his cheeks still flushed from their recent activities.

“I don’t know,” said Harry. “Maybe I’ll only stay for one drink. Maybe I’ll stay all night. I could find a nice bloke, maybe, to get off with in the loo before coming home.”

He watched Malfoy’s expression darken, a dangerous look in his eyes.

“But it doesn’t matter what time I’ll be home,” Harry continued as if he hadn’t noticed. “You’ll be ready for me, won’t you? Because you have nothing else better to do. Your life is meaningless.” He gripped Malfoy tighter, feeling a jutting hip bone. “You’re *nothing* without me.”

“Y-Yes.” Malfoy looked seconds away from falling to his knees again. “Yes, I’ll be ready.”

“Good,” said Harry, stroking his fingers through Malfoy’s hair, messing up the carefully styled strands.

He left Malfoy, rumpled and dazed, in the conference room with a smirk on his face.

That night when Harry returned home, sloshed from one too many pints, it was already encroaching early morning. He stumbled up the stairs to his room and threw open the door with a bang.

And Malfoy was waiting for him, just like he’d promised.

🔥

Harry’s better judgement continued to abandon him the next few weeks. Sometimes he thought it had momentarily returned, only for it to be swept away again in a rush of tangled limbs and grasping hands the next night. More often than not, Harry awoke with lips against his collarbone and a bony body pressed into his side.

If either Ron or Hermione found it strange that Harry was mysteriously absent from their usual evening get-togethers, neither of them mentioned anything. Though Padma did narrow her eyes at him when he came bumbling in one morning, his hair set askew and a deep purple mark visible on his neck.

So, while Harry’s bed was getting plenty of action, the other things in his life were not. The case of the missing Wand had still not been solved, and they were no closer to catching the arsonist. There were no new fires and no new leads.

Harry didn’t bother following Malfoy anymore. Missing Wand or not, Malfoy’s life was completely uninteresting, and Harry would rather take his godforsaken N.E.W.T.s than spend another minute watching Malfoy’s morning hair care routine. Besides, Harry knew exactly where Malfoy was at almost every point in the day. If he wasn’t at his tiny desk down in filing, then he was either worshipping Harry’s cock in a dirty Ministry bathroom or he was waiting on hands and knees in Harry’s bedroom at Grimmauld Place. So there really was no need.

Padma didn’t have much luck with Pansy either.

“She’s definitely hiding something,” Padma said, crossing her arms and scowling. She had spent the past month trailing after Pansy during her night shifts at St Mungos. “She spends way too much time in the break room, but I can’t figure out why. I always catch her coming out, but there’s never anyone inside. She’s not stealing supplies or sending any patronuses that I’m aware of—”

“Maybe,” said Harry, “she just needs a break. I heard nurses do that sometimes, you know… take breaks.”

That earned him an impressive glare and a dung bomb dropped onto his desk.

All in all, things were tolerable—not great, but also not terrible.

Malfoy was still a colossal prick and unnervingly thin, but Harry had gotten used to his snide comments and whip-quick insults. Especially now that Harry knew the exact way to subdue that poisonous tongue for his own use. Harry even took pleasure at the speed in which he could turn Malfoy’s sharp and pointy facade into a whimpering and gasping mess.

Sometimes, after their frantic rutting when sweat glistened on their skin, Malfoy would look at him, the low embers of lust still burning brightly behind silver irises. It was in these moments that Harry felt a stirring under his scalp, a rumble in his chest—the urge to grab Malfoy’s pointy face in his hands and press their lips together. They still had not kissed, never mouth to mouth, even after their many times together.

But then, Malfoy would turn away, rolling to the other side of Harry’s bed, each vertebrae on his back visible through the thin sheet, and the moment would be broken.

Weeks passed like this, and life continued—the *work* continued. Eventually, Harry got used to his bed smelling like smoke.

🔥

“Merlin’s saggy ball sack.” Harry slumped forward, head settling between Malfoy’s shoulder blades. His vision swam as his head cleared from the ground-breaking orgasm he’d just had.

Below him, Malfoy trembled, his body still taught with unreleased tension. They were both half-clothed, pants and trousers pushed down to mid-thigh. That was the farthest they had gotten before Harry had pushed Malfoy face first against the wall in the empty supply closet and slid inside, Malfoy still wet and open from their fucking earlier that morning.

Harry reached around and wrapped a hand around Malfoy’s hard prick, taking no care to be gentle.

With a few quick strokes, Malfoy was shaking in his arms. He let out one final gasp and slipped down the wall. Harry followed him down, until they were sitting side by side as they caught their breath. Their clothed shoulders pressed together, Harry too blissed out to bother moving away.

Sometimes, Harry thought this was the only time that they were both *real* —stripped away of all the superficial layers, left with only honesty and exhaustion. Sometimes, Harry liked to pretend that what they had was *real* —more than a hasty fuck in the middle of the workday or a hate-filled tumble beneath the sheets.

If it weren't for Malfoy's past, if it weren't for who Malfoy was, maybe they could have had something more.

But Malfoy didn't want that. *Harry* didn't want that.

Right?

Harry took a deep breath, his head clunking back against the wall, the smell of Malfoy's hair gel sneaking into his nose. He had gotten so used to Malfoy's smell by now, he almost didn't notice the smoke anymore.

He felt Malfoy's sweaty head falling sideways and jerked his shoulder, startling Malfoy awake.

"Hey, you better not pass out on me again."

Malfoy grunted, eyes half-slitted and hair mussed, looking all the world like a grumpy cat just woken up from a nap. Harry was always surprised that someone so sharp and prickly could also look so soft and… cute.

Harry raised an arm, and a water bottle zoomed from somewhere on a shelf and into his hand. "Drink," he said, opening the bottle and passing it to Malfoy. Without meaning to, a granola bar floated over and settled on Malfoy's knee—not that Malfoy would eat more than two bites.

Malfoy may have gained a bit of weight in the past few weeks (Harry forcing food on him before he managed to sneak out in the mornings), but he was still worryingly thin.

Not that Harry cared, really, but it was awfully inconvenient when Malfoy fainted in the middle of sex because of malnutrition.

Across the room, Harry heard his wand buzzing from where he had dropped it earlier, the pre-set timer reminding Harry of his upcoming meeting with the rest of the Auror Department.

Harry groaned just thinking about it. They were all so useless, the same tired excuses, the same endless stream of fabricated bullshit. Week after week of Robards's condescension, Hermione's coddling, and Harry's frustration.

"Fucking arsonist," Harry muttered to the room. That was another thing they sometimes did afterwards: sometimes he and Malfoy would talk.

Malfoy shuffled into an upright position and took a few gulps of water before responding. "What about him?"

“I just want to catch them already. I want it to be over.”

“Why?”

“What do you mean why?” Harry looked at him, eyes narrowed. “Because they’re hurting people, destroying homes, scaring families.”

Malfoy tilted his head to the side like he had an itch on his neck that wouldn’t go away. There were irritated red marks that would need to be healed before either of them returned to work.

“What if they deserve it?” he said, not looking at Harry.

Harry yanked his arm away, standing from the floor so abruptly Malfoy nearly toppled sideways.

“Are you fucking serious?”

“Wait. I didn’t mean—”

“Of course they don’t deserve it. How could you even say that?”

Harry thought about the poor clerk from J. Pippin’s Potions Shop, pleading hands reaching for Harry’s help as the shop had crumbled around her. Harry had saved her just like he had Robards. Not that it did much good in the end. She had died only a week later, painful coughs racking her frame until her very last breath, due to inhaling toxic gases from a potion that had exploded in the fire.

“There was nothing you could have done,” Robards had said, gruff voice even gruffer than usual, his own vocal chords recovering from all the smoke and the screams.

But that was a lie. Harry was just polite enough not to contradict him. There was always something he could have done.

Harry could have saved them sooner.

“No,” Harry said, shaking the memory away. He pulled up his trousers and shoved his shirt inside. “They didn’t deserve that.” Malfoy had still not moved from the ground, looking up at Harry, his face full of apprehension and… fear?

At last, *fear.* Malfoy was finally scared of him, and Harry didn’t even know why.

“I can’t believe you would think that those people deserved having their shops burned to the ground.” He took a step closer and glared down at Malfoy. “You haven’t changed at all, have you? You make me sick.”

He was *this* close to kicking Malfoy in the side and stomping his face into the floor. It would only be fair, Harry thought. Payback for what happened on the train at the beginning of sixth year. And with the way Malfoy was talking, it was almost like *he* was the arsonist.

But no, Malfoy was just a coward, spineless and willing to follow the first powerful person who came his way.

“The only people who deserve it are people like *you.* Selfish, disgusting scum,” Harry spat. The shelves rattled, the air thickened, Harry’s palms started vibrating. Malfoy glanced apprehensively at the shuddering door but didn’t flinch away from Harry’s outburst of furious magic.

“Harry, I didn’t… I just meant—”

“Save it, Malfoy.” He grabbed his Auror robes, shoving his arms through the sleeves and doing up the buttons with a snap of his fingers. Summoning his wand, he stalked towards the door and flung it open, causing Malfoy to squint into the blinding light from the hallway.

“And it’s Potter to you—not Harry,” he said before slamming the door.

The next night was pub night.

Harry sat at the bar, blood thrumming from throwing back yet another shot. He was wiping away a burning drop with the back of his hand when Ron draped a gangly arm across his shoulder.

“Hermione’s heading out, and we’re off to go dance,” Ron said, grinning over at Lavender as she did a twirl with Hermione before kissing her cheek and waving goodbye.

Hermione had miraculously cleared her ever-filling schedule and left her undersecretary duties for the evening to grace them with her presence (for a little while at least). Lavender had been beyond ecstatic—the two witches gossiping away so quickly that Harry soon lost track of who was shagging who and who had posed for a nude photoshoot in the latest edition of the Quibbler.

“You coming or not?” Harry felt a firm slap on the back before Ron released him.

“Not in the mood.”

Ron frowned. “You sure, mate? You haven’t been out in ages. We could go somewhere else if you want. A bit crowded in here, innit?”

“It’s fine.”

“Yeah, but if you want to go somewhere quieter to grab a pint or something—”

“Just *go,* Ron.” He gave his best friend a slight shove and rolled his eyes when Lavender immediately pulled him into the world’s worst rendition of Cotton Eye Joe.

Harry contented himself with waving down the bartender and ordering another shot, glancing briefly around the pub as was his habit ever since surviving an entire war and joining the Aurors directly after.

Malfoy and his pointy chin were lingering by the door, pale eyes scanning the crowd of wriggling bodies. He hadn't spotted Harry yet, but Harry wasn't about to sit around and wait until he did.

He grabbed the nearest available person and kissed them on the mouth.

"Well, well." The person pulled back, a deviously attractive witch with beautiful brown skin even darker than Harry's and large gold hoops in their ears. "Your place or mine?" they raised a pierced eyebrow.

"Mine, if you don't mind." Harry smiled at them, but his face felt too tight. It wasn't a real smile, not really.

"I don't mind at all," they said, dark eyes roving over Harry's figure.

Harry brought them home and fucked them into the mattress. He fucked them until the sheets no longer smelled like smoke and the image of slick blonde hair faded from beneath his eyelids.

He was awakened early the next morning, the sun barely breaching the foggy horizon, by Robards's patronus soaring through the wall and landing on his pillowcase. The falcon was as brilliant as ever, cunning and deadly, as it regarded him over his guest's sleeping head.

"There's been another fire."

🔥

The last time Harry had visited Malfoy Manor had been… Well, mostly Harry avoided thinking about that. Ignored that entire year of his life, more accurately.

But here he was, wand in hand, gaping at what was not so much Malfoy Manor but rather a towering wall of ghastly orange flames.

"Harry!" Ron's familiar voice called to him from a few feet away.

"Ron!" Harry jogged toward him, only then noticing Ron draping an old knitted quilt over a hunched figure by his side.

"Potter." Malfoy's eyes flashed, the same colour as the smoke swirling around them.

Harry ignored him. "Where's Lavender? Where's Padma?"

"Went to scout the perimeter. Laying down the foundation runes."

"Good," said Harry, sweeping his wand and setting up the beginnings of the Heat Disbursement and Oxygen Depletion Charms. With so much open space, they should be able to set up an airtight bubble in no time. "Anyone still inside?"

Ron's face turned solemn. "Robards ran in to pull Lucius Malfoy out."

“How long ago?” Harry said urgently, already starting to stride closer to the burning mansion.

He stopped when he felt a hand grab his arm.

“You can’t.” Malfoy’s hair shone in the light of the fire, an absurd glowing orange. He almost looked like he was radiating fire himself.

“Let go, Malfoy. I need to go after Robards.”

Malfoy only gripped him tighter. “If you go in there, there’s no coming out. The house will trap you forever. It’s a self-destructive protocol for a potential invasion. The Dark Lord added it during his most pleasant stay. Robards didn’t listen when I told him.”

“Ron,” Harry said, still glaring at Malfoy and his glowing orange hair, “can houses do that?”

Ron was watching their interaction closely, eyes honed in on where Malfoy was still touching Harry’s sleeve.

“Yeah,” he said eventually, sounding resigned. “If I had gotten here sooner, I would have tried to stop Robards myself.”

“But you know how strong I am, how I was able to break the other wards. If I could just get to him—”

“Potter, these aren’t some last minute Entrapment Charms,” Malfoy cut in acidly. “These are ritualistic wards tied to the very magic of the house. Thousand-year-old magic. Once set into motion, not even the Dark Lord himself could undo them.”

Ron sighed. “I hate to agree, but the git is right. There’ll be no way out if you go in.”

Harry yanked himself out of Malfoy’s grip and moved towards the house only for Ron to stop him, tall body blocking his path and the flames from view.

“Get out of my way, Ron.”

“Harry, please listen for a second—”

“GET OUT OF MY WAY, RON!” Harry shoved at his chest, Ron stumbling back a step, and raised his wand. Ron raised his wand as well, face weary but determined, his back towards the flames. Harry didn’t know why he was being so difficult about this. It was almost like Ron wanted him to fail, like he wanted the fire to succeed.

There was a loud blast, and Ron spun around, the ground shaking. Fifty foot flames hurled into the sky, the roof bursting open like some destructive blooming flower. The walls trembled before shattering in a flash of light, the entire manor sinking into a black chasm that had opened in the ground.

Black ashes swirled in a tornado of smoke, whipping across their group and causing them to stumble blindly into each other.

Eventually the earth settled, the wind retreated, the fire extinguishing itself as quickly as it had started. Malfoy Manor, once so magnificent and proud, was nothing more than a pile of ashes, burnt and broken.

But Harry didn't care about that. He didn't care about the thousands of years of sodding pureblood history going up in smoke. The manor should have been destroyed a long time ago in his opinion.

No, Harry only cared about one thing:

Robards was dead, and *Harry could have saved him.*

Chapter 4: Haunting Blue

“Oh, Harry.” Hermione pulled him into a crushing hug. Harry stood stiffly and awkwardly patted her back.

The meeting with Kingsley had been one of little fanfare. Harry had been sworn in as the new Head Auror (“The youngest in a century!” the papers would declare tomorrow), bestowed a new badge to attach to his robes, and handed a box to clean out Robards’s old office so that he could move in instead. He had signed some papers with Hermione looking over his shoulder and shaken the Minister’s hand.

Kingsley had looked wearier than usual, shoulders slumping with guilt and avoiding everyone’s eye, but what did Kingsley have to feel guilty about? Harry was the one who had failed. Harry was the one now benefiting in the aftermath.

Hermione pulled back, her eyes a bit wet, and Harry felt relieved. He never had been the best at dealing with emotions, and dealing with other people’s was even worse.

“Oh, Harry. I’m sorry. I know this isn’t how you wanted it to happen—”

“I didn’t want this to happen at all,” interrupted Harry.

“Yes, of course not. I just mean you *were* planning on taking over Robards’s position as soon as he retired.”

“I wasn’t,” said Harry.

“But you… well, nevermind. Are you alright though? How have you been doing?”

“Fine like always, Hermione.” And then because it was only polite to return the sentiment. “And how are you?”

Hermione looked away, her cheeks going a bit pink. “Alright. I’ve been good. Yeah, good.”

“Working late a lot?” said Harry. Last time at the pub had been the first time Harry had seen Hermione in weeks. If it weren’t for her regularly scheduled memos appearing in the Auror office, he would have thought she had disappeared to Antarctica.

Hermione hummed in an absentminded sort of way. “Mmhm. You know, the usual.”

“Right, good,” said Harry, and then didn’t know what else to say.

“Do you have any new leads yet?” Hermione said before the silence became too uncomfortable.

“No, not yet. It seems the only people with access to the property were the Malfoys themselves, but it’s unlikely it was one of them.”

“Well…” Hermione said cautiously, biting her lip. “What if it *was* one of them? Draco Malfoy was there at the scene.”

He shook his head slowly. “If it was him, why would he kill his own father? He adored him.”

Hermione looked at him curiously, a slight furrow in her brow. “Harry, I think it’s been a long time since he listened to anything his father said.” He glanced at her and tried not to scowl in disbelief. “All I’m saying is, it’s an awfully convenient coincidence that the one weekend Narcissa Malfoy was out of town was the day the manor burned down, like whoever was behind it didn’t want to harm her. She almost never leaves the manor nowadays, she or Mr Malfoy.”

“It could have been him, then, since he was also home. Wanted to off himself, so he took the house down with him.”

“Maybe,” said Hermione, but she still looked sceptical. “It doesn’t seem like his style though. Family pride and all.” She turned and set her hand on his arm. “But Harry, just be careful. We still don’t know who the arsonist is or if this is even the same one. Be careful around Malfoy is all I’m saying.”

But what did Hermione know? She had been suspiciously absent these last few weeks, offering useless platitudes and even going so far as to block parts of their investigation, deeming them “a waste of government resources and a misuse of our time.”

“You don’t have to worry, Hermione. I’m always careful.”

🔥

Harry owled Malfoy the next afternoon.

He appeared on Harry’s doorstep, clean-shaven, not a single strand out of place. If Harry had been looking for signs that Malfoy had been weeping over his late father, there were none to be found.

Harry ushered him into the house, neither of them talking until they finished climbing the stairs and Malfoy started towards the bed, ready to get into Harry’s favourite position.

“Draco, I’m sorry.” Harry didn’t want to beat around the bush anymore. Whatever had happened, whatever he was feeling about Malfoy, he couldn’t ignore it any longer. Even if he had briefly entertained the thought that Malfoy had been the arsonist, looking at his worn face—sallow skin and hunched shoulders—there was just no way.

“Oh, so we’re using first names now, are we?” Malfoy paused in unbuttoning his shirt.

Harry set his jaw. “I’m sorry about your father,” he muttered through clenched teeth.

“Don’t say things you don’t mean.” Malfoy sneered. “He was just another Death Eater who deserved to die, wasn’t he? Like me.” He threw his head back and laughed, cold and emotionless, sounding so similar to his late cousin Bellatrix that the hairs on Harry’s arm

stood on end. “Isn’t that right, Potter? Death Eaters don’t deserve to live. Or do you just like to tell me that without actually believing it?”

“I did. I *do,”* said Harry, frustrated but he couldn’t quite pinpoint why. “I still believe Death Eaters are terrible, heartless monsters. They’re an abomination on this earth who deserve to be tortured for their sins. But you’re not like that. You’re different. You care.”

“Oh, now I’m different, am I? That’s not what you said last week.”

“I know, I just—” Harry ran an agitated hand through his hair. “I shouldn’t have said that, alright? But sometimes I just get so angry. At everyone. At everything. How unfair it all is.” And that was the problem, wasn’t it? Harry was stuck, trapped in this continuous cycle of unfair decisions and endless grief.

He sat on the edge of the bed, dropping his head into his hands. “I mean… how am I even alive? How is anyone? Who gets to decide? What determines who dies and who gets left behind? Why do I deserve to live? Why was I the one left alive?” His voice cracked at the end, and he stared down at the rumpled bedspread. He had made sure to wash it right after returning from the fire at the manor. He hadn’t liked the smell of the stranger from the pub staining his bed.

“Harry.” Malfoy’s voice was rough and strangled-sounding. Harry looked up to meet his gaze. Malfoy’s eyes were pitch black, blacker than the manor’s ashes that had been swept into the sky.

“Fuck me,” said Malfoy.

“Draco, I don’t know if now is a good time—”

“Fuck me, Harry. Put it in me *now.”* Malfoy’s eyes were roaming over his face, devouring him, savouring him. It was like looking into the heart of the fire, pulling Harry closer even though he knew he shouldn’t. Knowing it was going to destroy him.

Knowing it was going to ruin him.

“Okay,” said Harry.

🔥

“Draco, wait.” He pulled out of Malfoy and backed away.

Malfoy sent him a sharp look over a naked shoulder. Harry had never paused during sex before. Only when he was sticky and sated did Harry normally stop, and even then sometimes he wouldn’t pull out, merely staying inside Malfoy, waiting to grow hard again so they could go another round.

“I want,”—he paused, took a deep breath—“for you to be in charge. For you to be in control.”

Slowly, Malfoy got off hands and knees and turned to look at Harry.

“You want… me to be in charge?”

“Yes.”

“You want… me to top?”

In all the times they had been together, all the times they had brought each other to orgasm, Harry had never let Malfoy take control. It had always been quick hard fucks, Harry pushing Malfoy’s face into the bed, the desk, the wall. It had never been Malfoy setting the pace, Malfoy taking what he wanted while Harry surrendered it.

“Yes.”

Harry shifted to the other side of the bed and laid on his back.

Malfoy simply stared, his hands minutely shaking, sweat-slicked hair falling into his eyes.

“I…” Malfoy swallowed, crawled across the bed, and stared down at Harry—not touching, just looking. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Harry stretched out his hand, the bottle of lube flying into his palm. He handed it over to Malfoy.

“Alright,” said Malfoy. He nodded. “Alright,” he said again. He clicked the lube open and drizzled some onto his fingers; they were so long, so thin. Harry could only imagine the places they could reach, the way they could spread him open.

“Relax,” said Malfoy. His voice was a low whisper, tender and filled with so much emotion it was nearly overwhelming. “I’ll take care of you.”

Harry felt his limbs loosening one by one. First his legs when Malfoy spread them open, gently massaging his thighs. Then his arms when Malfoy raised them above his head, having him grip the headboard and leaving a soft kiss on each elbow. Finally his chest when Malfoy coaxed his eyes closed, told him to take a deep breath, and circled the first finger around his rim.

“You’re so good, Harry,” Malfoy whispered and pushed the first finger inside.

Electricity fizzled up his spine, exploded beneath his eyelids. His back arched off the bed, Malfoy’s hand on his chest the only thing tethering him back to earth.

He gasped, choked, revelled in the feeling of pleasure in his lungs, chased the heady feeling of surrendering his body to someone else.

“That’s it,” Malfoy’s low voice crooned. “You’re so good. *So, so* good.”

Another finger, another burst of desire flaring through him.

“You deserve everything, Harry. I’m going to give you everything.” Malfoy added a third finger, scissored them apart, trailed his other hand lower to cup Harry’s balls.

Harry was falling, being taken apart piece by piece by Malfoy’s hands, pushed again and again off the edge of the cliff. His arse clenched around Malfoy’s fingers, pulling them in deeper, wanting to feel *more.*

“Harry,” Malfoy groaned, and then his lips were on Harry’s neck, sucking hard enough to break skin, hot breath moaning in Harry’s ear.

“Do it,” said Harry. “Put your cock in me. I’m ready.”

Malfoy pulled back, looked into Harry’s eyes intently, and brushed back a stray strand of black hair. That was how he slid inside—staring into Harry’s eyes, breaths mixing between them, but still not kissing (not quite).

“Yes,” Harry hissed when Malfoy was fully inside, the pain and the pleasure almost too much to bear (but not quite).

“Harry.” The word was a plea, an exclamation of forgiveness, a benediction meant for only them to hear.

Malfoy pulled out and slid back in. Harry shuddered around the unforgiving hardness, his hands falling from the headboard, but Malfoy didn’t notice, his head thrown back in pleasure, his eyes shut tight.

“Harry,” Malfoy said again. That seemed to be all he could say, a litany of *“Harry, Harry, Harry.”*

Malfoy threaded their fingers together and fucked forward, Harry’s arse opening for him, begging him without words to fuck him deeper, fuck him harder. It had been a while since Harry had done this, and he’d forgotten how much he loved it. His muscles were relearning how to receive pleasure, clenching sporadically around Malfoy’s cock.

It hurt, his rim burning from the incessant stretch, his prostrate over-sensitive from the constant touch, but it was also good. *So good.*

Malfoy slammed in again, and Harry’s body bounced on the bed, his arse throbbing with each pulse of Malfoy’s hips, Malfoy’s cock burrowing deeper and deeper inside. Harry’s eyes started to water, from the pain or the pleasure—he wasn’t sure which, but he didn’t care.

It was obscene. It was filthy. It was *perfect.*

Harry had never felt so absolutely free, so absolutely out of control. He didn’t have to worry about what to do, where to go, what spell to cast, who to report back to. All he had to worry about was Malfoy’s harsh breaths panting into his neck, the way his back muscles rippled beneath Harry’s hands. He didn’t have to do anything but lay back and let the waves take him, the waves of sparks starting from the tips of his toes. Letting them crest, letting them fall.

Letting Malfoy fuck him.

Harry had never been fucked by *anyone* like this before.

Malfoy settled on top of Harry, shifted Harry's legs higher until he was practically bent in half, and bore down. With each thrust, each stroke, Malfoy's full weight settled on Harry's thighs. Each *snap snap snap* of his hips sending a bolt of pleasure through Harry's prostate, straight to his cock.

Malfoy whimpered deep in his throat and pulled out, only keeping the tip inside, propping himself up on his elbows to look down at Harry.

"I'm close," he said, eyes flashing, teeth gritted from the strain, forehead beaded with sweat.

"Me too," said Harry. He placed a hand on Malfoy's chest, right above the glistening tattoo. Malfoy inhaled sharply, and the phoenix's wings seemed to rise, flaring out like it was ready to fly away. Malfoy whimpered, hips slamming forward and impaling Harry in one hard thrust.

"Fuck," Harry gasped. And then he was coming, a stream of white spraying across his stomach and hitting Malfoy's chest. He couldn't stop it. He couldn't wait. It just kept coming and coming and coming.

"Harry." Malfoy whipped his hips, pounding his cock into Harry's clenching hole. Then "Harry, Harry, *Harry,"* and Malfoy was coming too, pulsing deep inside. Harry squeezed him tighter just to hear Malfoy groan, a deep guttural sound, like it had been torn from his throat, like it had been ripped from his chest without his permission. He wanted to bottle that sound, wrap it in a box, and send it to everyone he knew.

That Malfoy could sound like that. That *Harry* could make him sound like that. It was a revelation; it was a temptation of the highest degree.

Malfoy rolled off him, breathing heavily. He stared at the painted ceiling, hand twitching at his side. Harry reached across the bed and fitted their hands together.

The next morning, Harry woke with arms hugging his chest and a nose pressed into his hair, the bed beside him warm, the sheets smelling like smoke.

🔥

How did the saying go again? Oh yes, that was it.

Life goes on.

And indeed it did.

No one batted an eye when Harry took over the Auror Department, Padma becoming his temporary second-in-command. Ron had refused the promotion with a "Nah, mate. I'm good. I'd rather not die, thanks," while Padma had accepted with a "I've got nothing left to lose, so I might as well" and a sad glance at Parvati's portrait sitting on her desk. Even the more

senior Aurors merely gave him a stern nod and settled into meetings without protest. It was almost as if they had planned for this—that they had *expected* this. Harry couldn't say he was entirely surprised.

But sometimes he just wished… was it too much to ask to have a choice in the matter? Instead of his entire life having some grand plan, wouldn't it be great if he actually got to *choose?*

He and Padma threw themselves into the arson case.

But Robards had been right: there wasn't much they could do. Harry retraced the areas, re-asked the same questions, reviewed the same paperwork. However, even with the fire at Malfoy Manor, the trail soon ran cold.

Harry tried begging Kingsley for more resources, more help, *anything,* but Kingsley remained stern, a cloak of grief and guilt hanging around his shoulders. He seemed under the impression that he was the direct cause of Robards's death. Which was a ridiculous notion, but what did Harry, the new Head Auror and someone who was actually at the Malfoy Manor fire, know?

When Padma hinted at following Malfoy again, Harry waved off her concern with a twist of his wrist and the door slamming in her face. When Harry, in a last ditch attempt at information, desperately approached Padma about the pictures of Parkinson at the museum, she only sighed.

"She was just meeting a friend," Padma said, swivelling around in her chair and crossing her arms.

"Which friend?"

"It's not relevant to the case." Harry began to protest, and Padma gave him a quelling look. "I interviewed the friend. They said they were with her the whole time and didn't notice anything amiss. The two of them went into the exhibit for ten minutes, then spent the rest of the day in the Muggle half of the museum."

Harry found it curious that Padma refused to give up this careful piece of information but decided not to dwell on it.

And that had been the end of it.

The potions smuggling ring was steadily growing (Susan had gone undercover and needed to be extracted, so that was a whole mess), the local hippogriff population was experiencing a baffling number of attacks and required Auror protection (Harry spent much of his first week as Head Auror shepherding hippogriffs between paddocks), and the banshees in Knockturn Alley were refusing to follow quiet hours and causing a ruckus (Harry sent Padma to deal with that one; he had never liked banshees much).

The pile of papers on his desk was constantly growing, his stash of Pepper-Up potions constantly depleting, and the hours in the day never ending.

Every evening, Harry returned home, exhausted and strung out, and let Malfoy stroke long fingers through his hair until he fell asleep.

Harry woke to a dark room, an arm curled around his waist, a warm body pressed to his back.

His wand buzzed from the nightstand beside him, the Auror hotline flashing red with a distress call. As soon as Harry touched the wand, a single sheet of paper burst into existence. Harry lit the tip of his wand to read through it quickly.

The sheets rustled behind him. “Harry, what’s going on? Why are you awake?”

Harry was already up from the bed, summoning his robes into his hand. His watch soon followed, along with the ‘Welcome to London!’ keychains. He patted along the pockets of his robes.

“Hey, Draco, have you seen my glasses?”

Malfoy squinted, rubbing at his eyes, his voice groggy and only sounding half-awake. “On the table downstairs by the Floo. Remember you left them there yesterday when you were reading?”

“Right, thanks,” said Harry. He finished the last button on his robes.

“Harry, what’s going on?”

Harry carefully stepped over to the side of the bed and ran a hand through Malfoy’s ridiculous bed hair. “There’s been another fire. I’m sorry I woke you. Go back to sleep if you can.”

“Another fire?” Malfoy said, suddenly sounding much more awake. “But that’s impossible.”

“Nothing is impossible.”

“But I haven’t… But I thought they’d stopped. Whoever was behind it just gave up.”

“Afraid not,” said Harry. He sighed and dropped his hand. “Looks like they were just biding their time. I don’t know how long this will take, but you’re welcome to stay. There’s eggs and bacon in the fridge if you get hungry.” Harry knew by now that Malfoy probably wouldn’t eat them. He only ate food when Harry very nearly forced it into him.

He didn’t know what possessed him, but Harry leaned down and kissed the top of Draco’s confused head. Draco hardly seemed to notice, brows pinched together.

Harry Apparated to the address of the distress call, a small shop on Carnaby Street.

“Shit,” he said as soon as he landed and stared up at the flames.

This was one of the worst ones yet.

🔥

Harry sat in his office, the door tightly closed, head bowed.

Padma reached across the desk and laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. Hermione clutched his hand tightly, stroking the back with her thumb. Hermione gave Padma a small sad smile, and Padma quickly looked away.

The fire had been terrible, uncontrollable—burning shops left and right. It had taken their small team of Aurors long into the morning to smother the flames, and by then it had almost spread down the entire street.

Two innocent people had died—a father and a son—smothered in smoke while sleeping in their flat. Mrs Deborah Betrüg—wife and mother of the deceased pair—had been so distraught they barely got a word out of her. The only passerby at the time had been an ageing man, Mr Gleason Jimston, a twitchy fellow with a gold tooth and ripped robes. But he had been too preoccupied consoling the wailing woman to give much useful information. If Harry hadn't known any better, he would have assumed them to be a couple with the way the woman clutched at the man's sleeve.

Something was bothering Harry, a nagging wrongness that lingered long after the fire had been extinguished.

The fire had been different, had been *wrong*.

Usually, the fires felt familiar—searing and dangerous, yes, but also familiar. They felt like an angry pet lashing out against its owner, destructive in its anger, both to itself and to its surroundings, but still domesticated, controllable.

This fire, however, was wild. It was feral and scared, unnecessarily violent, unnecessarily obstinate. This fire was a beast that Harry had never known existed, had never encountered before. It felt more like an amateur's work, similar to how Goyle's fire had felt in the Room of Requirement all those years ago.

It had been a different caster, a different arsonist. *An imposter.* Harry could feel it in his bones. All the previous fires had been started by the same person, an experienced person, but this one was different.

He mentioned this in his office afterwards, Padma frowning in contemplation, Hermione frowning in disbelief.

"But how do you know?" said Hermione for the fifth time.

"I just do, Hermione. I just do."

"Yes, but Harry—"

"You weren't there!" Harry yelled, sick and tired of having to explain himself. "You weren't there, so how would you know?"

Hermione bit her lip, eyes darting to the table. “No, I wasn’t there,” she said. “I’m sorry. I believe you, alright?” She reached out to take Harry’s hand, but he pulled away, and she let her hand fall.

“So what do we do now? We have two arsonists we have to catch instead of one.”

Thankfully, Padma had some ideas.

After scouring the area for hours, they had found a torn piece of fabric left at the crime scene. They could track its magical signature with the use of some slightly (possibly very) illegal spells. As long as it got results and didn’t hurt anyone in the process, Harry didn’t care about those types of formalities, and he said so to Hermione’s disapproval.

Padma got to work right away. Although Harry privately thought it wouldn’t be any use. The man with the gold tooth, Mr Jimston, had clearly torn his robes earlier, so it was unlikely the spell would lead them anywhere except back to the scene of the crime or down the street to the Jimston residence.

When Harry returned home, many many hours later, there was a plate of eggs and bacon waiting on the table. Malfoy’s Stasis Charm had worn off hours ago. The food was stone cold and completely unappetizing, but Harry didn’t care. He scarfed it down and even licked the plate clean.

He collapsed onto his bed and buried his face in the pillow, inhaling Malfoy’s unique combination of smoke and hair gel and freshly pressed robes. He could almost pretend Malfoy was still there, curled up by his side.

🔥

It was nearly a week later, a blessed Saturday when Harry had not been called in to work, when Malfoy appeared on his doorstep brandishing a bottle of wine.

They laughed and drank, danced in the hallway to the annoyance of Dear Walburga’s portrait, and almost got through an entire conversation without insulting each other. They bumped knees under the table and held hands on top of it.

Harry had never been happier.

At one point, Harry found himself talking about work.

“Still nothing on the Carnaby Street fire or the imposter,” he said, sipping from his glass of wine.

“Hmm,” said Malfoy, “that is a shame,” and then said no more.

When they fucked that night, there were sweet words and gentle caresses, tentative kisses on flushed cheeks, and soft smiles against sharp collarbones. It had never been like this before—so happy, so carefree.

Harry had never had this with *anyone* before.

He fell asleep, exhausted and content, head buried in Malfoy's neck, Malfoy's scent swirling around him.

Harry dreamed of Fiendfyre—smoke and flames and heat against his skin.

Malfoy was there, and he was pulling away.

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere, love. I'll be right back." Malfoy caressed his cheek.

Malfoy had called him love. He had never done that before.

Malfoy loved him.

Harry's eyes fell closed, sleep claiming him once more.

Chapter 5: Savage Yellow

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry woke the next morning, his head pounding, Malfoy snoring at his side. Malfoy always insisted he didn't snore, but Harry would beg to differ.

Hermione's otter glided across his side table.

"Situation at Gringotts. Need to talk to the goblins. The Minister will meet you there."

Harry crawled out of bed, careful not to jostle a sleeping Malfoy, and summoned his robes. He hastily scrawled a note about where he had gone and left it resting on his pillow for Malfoy to find when he woke.

He kissed the crown of Malfoy's head and Apparated to the steps of Gringotts.

Kingsley was already there, robes billowing around him, Hermione at his side. Upon catching sight of Harry, she gave a distracted wave and continued arguing with one of the goblins.

Kingsley strolled forward with another goblin, beckoning for Harry to follow. It was strange, Harry thought, to see Kingsley in amongst all the action. He had never seen the Minister investigate the scene of the fires before, not even after Robards had gone up in smoke at Malfoy Manor. That was *odd.*

Harry caught up just in time to catch the Minister's next question.

"What do you mean nothing was stolen?"

Harry slowed himself to a brisk walk, trying to copy Robards's calm, confident pace and making himself seem more official.

"As I said, Minister"—the goblin narrowed its beady eyes—"the vault in question was broken into, but nothing was taken, only destroyed."

"Hang on," said Harry, "destroyed?"

"Yes," clicked the goblin impatiently. "Now if you only allow me to escort you—"

"What happened?" said Harry, turning to Kingsley. "What do they mean destroyed?"

"The goblins have informed me that this morning during routine maintenance, they noticed a vault door had been tampered with. Upon closer inspection, they found the door had been sealed shut."

"But aren't all their doors sealed? What's so different about—"

Kingsley glanced down at him, looking regal in his deep purple robes. “The door was magically sealed by a witch or a wizard. When the Curse-Breakers were called to unseal it, they found the insides completely burnt to the ground.”

“Burnt?” exclaimed Harry, staggering back and losing pace with the Minister’s long strides.

“Exactly,” Kingsley rumbled in his deep voice. “You see the implication of this.”

“Do we know if it was the same person? Was there any evidence left behind?”

“We’re about to find out,” said Kingsley, stepping into the cart.

The tunnels in Gringotts were as dark and terrifying as Harry remembered. Harry clutched his roiling stomach, silently willing himself not to expel last night’s dinner. That would certainly not be a good look as the department's new Head Auror.

After much winding and seemingly unnecessary elevation drops, the cart rolled to a stop. A cluster of wixen and goblins were huddled near a nondescript-looking door.

“Harry!” a cheery voice called from the mix.

“Bill!” Harry was crushed into a hug, long red hair flying into his face and tickling his nose. “How are you? How have you been?”

Bill pulled back, keeping a broad hand gripping Harry’s shoulder. “Alright, I s’pose. Victoire is getting pretty big now. Going on seven soon. Sorry we missed you at the last holiday gathering. Fleur missed her family too much. And now that I’m stationed over in Ireland, I feel like we hardly get to see each other. How’s Ron? How’s Hermione and the gang?”

“Yeah, well it’s our fault as well,” replied Harry amicably. “Ron’s been busy shacking up with Lavender, and then I got promoted to Head Auror, and it’s been a right mess for a while.”

“Don’t worry about it, Harry.” He clapped Harry firmly on the shoulder, sending him staggering. “We’ll have to catch up while I’m back in town.”

“Yes, why are you in town actually?”

“Ahh… Maayo is the usual Gringotts liaison, but she walked straight into a doxy trap last week. Hasn’t recovered yet, so I got called in instead. Nasty business, this is.” Bill shook his head. Harry caught a glimpse of his signature fang earring swinging to and fro.

“Yes, and can you tell us what business this is exactly?” Kingsley’s voice cut in.

“Good to see you again, Minister.” Bill winked before sweeping his hand to the side. “And of course… just follow me. Try not to step on anything. We might be able to use it as evidence later.”

The door to the vault had been blasted to the side, several Preserving Charms artfully keeping it pieced together. Harry followed them into the vault and immediately wanted to get the hell

back out.

Grey ashes covered the wall, heavy smoke lingered in the air, and the smell of burnt flesh seeped into Harry's pores.

In the middle of the floor, surrounded by a pile of burnt possessions, was a body, laying curled on its side.

"Christ," said Harry, fighting the urge to plug his nose.

"Like I said," said Bill, wrinkling his own nose, "nasty business. Murdered. Lured into the vault, sealed inside, and set on fire. No alarms went off because he was merely visiting his own vault."

"What about the after hours alarm?" said Harry, circling the body. He couldn't stop staring at it. It was as grotesque as it was intriguing: somes parts peeling with blackened skin, other parts burnt all the way to the bone, and yet other parts were covered in red blisters, glistening and vile. The mouth hung open in a silent scream.

"Based on the charmwork, he's been trapped here since yesterday afternoon."

Kingsley paced across the vault, inspecting the walls. "Some of these piles are still smoking which suggests the fire was set more recently." He waved his wand at a pile of ashes. They spun in a thin column and fell back to the ground. "Make the victim wait through the night then burn him in the morning?"

"It's possible." Bill shrugged. "I think the more difficult part would be starting a remote Fire Charm. Because that means, unless the murderer stayed here the whole time, they had to have started the fire from outside Gringotts."

"Where are his robes?"

"We didn't find any. Checked the ashes already too. Either he banished them himself or the murderer took them."

While Bill and Kingsley continued theorising, Harry knelt down beside the body. Although the fire and the arsonist were long gone, Harry felt a lingering magic in the surroundings—familiar and sinister. Harry was sure this was the work of the original arsonist, careful and calculated, not the shoddy work of the imposter.

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry caught a glint of gold. He reached into the mouth of the burnt body and removed it.

"Minister," Harry said, rising, "whose vault did you say this was again?"

"I didn't," said Kingsley, eyebrow raised. "It belonged to Gleason Jimston."

"Right," said Harry, holding up the gold tooth. "The same Mr Jimston who saved Mrs Betrüg at the Carnaby Street fire a week ago? Who seemed much too interested in her and refused to leave her side?"

“Yes, the very same.”

Bill gave a low whistle. “Galloping gargoyles,” he said, “what are the chances of that? Saves someone from a fire one week, caught in a fire the next.”

“Yeah…” said Harry, “what are the chances?”

“It just doesn’t make sense,” said Harry, setting down a stack of absolutely useless papers and rubbing the bridge of his nose.

Their interview with Deborah Betrüg had revealed nothing besides a possible potions addiction and a suspicious number of expensive necklaces gifted by the recently deceased Mr Jimston. She had been saddened to hear of Mr Jimston’s fate (“Oh, such a tragedy. He was always very friendly with me. Very neighbourly, you see.”), but she hadn’t been *that* heartbroken, not that Harry could tell.

Padma barely glanced up from across the room where a network of runes were floating above a ripped piece of cloth. Harry had cleared a space in the back of his office to allow Padma to work on finding the owner of the piece of fabric left at the Carnaby Street fire.

While Tracking Charms on private citizens without a proper warrant were *technically* illegal, Harry thought it was for a good cause.

“Harry, we’ve been over this.” She made a spiral motion with her wand and the runes started to glow blue. “If it didn’t make sense the tenth time, what makes you think it’s going to make sense the twenty-eighth?”

There was a bright flash, and the runes sparked red before collapsing.

“Fuck. I almost had it that time too.” Padma wiped a hand across her brow.

“I just don’t get why the real arsonist would kill Jimston unless he was finishing the job after the imposter couldn’t,” continued Harry. “Do you think they’re working together?”

“I don’t know,” said Padma, sounding distracted. She was currently kneeling on the ground, redrawing the runes with a piece of chalk. With anyone else, Harry would have assumed they had long lost interest in the conversation, but Padma was a master of multitasking. He just had to wait out her answer.

Sure enough not a minute later, Padma reemerged from the floor, looking determined. She raised her wand, and the new runes slowly rose, starting a careful counter-clockwise rotation. “Based on what we know about the original arsonist, it doesn’t seem likely they’re working with the imposter. They wouldn’t want to be associated with such shoddy work like the Carnaby Street fire.”

Harry nodded. “That’s what I think as well. But then what’s the connection with Gleason Jimston? He didn’t only die, but everything in his vault was burned. It felt almost like a punishment.”

“I think”—Padma flicked her wand, and the runes started to glow blue once more—“our arsonist is a bit of a prick. Doesn’t want anyone else showing them up, so they got rid of the competition. What if Jimston was the imposter?”

“Risky move, staying at the scene of the crime if he was.” Harry frowned as he thought. “Nah, I don’t think so. He seemed pretty frantic at the Carnaby Street fire. Definitely not like someone who wanted to burn his own street down. That’s like saying Draco set his own house on fire.”

“It’s possible.”

Harry groaned. “That’s exactly what Hermione said.”

Padma flinched, the runes dropping back to the floor. She let out a string of swear words.

“Hey,” said Harry. “What’s going on between you two anyway? Last time you saw her, you barely spoke to each other. Couldn’t even look her in the eye.”

“It’s… well…” Padma busied herself, rolling the sleeves of her robes and reshuffling items along the floor.

“Well, what?” said Harry.

“Well I… I can’t tell you.”

“Why not?” It wasn’t like Padma to keep secrets from him, or at all really. The fact that she was openly admitting it now was deeply unsettling.

“It’s… Harry, can you just leave it? I promised Hermione I wouldn’t say anything.”

“Why would Hermione not want you to—”

“Because it’s embarrassing.” Hermione bustled in, her arms laden with books, frizzy hair falling out of her ponytail. Padma’s face went beat red, shoulders stiffening. Hermione rolled her eyes.

“You remember how I was assigned to trail Parkinson?” Padma said, glancing around the room and looking everywhere except Hermione.

“Yeah…” said Harry.

“Well, I might have done too good of a job because… uhh…”

“She caught us *in flagrante delicto,* as they say.” Hermione sniffed, nose held high.

Harry barely refrained from spitting a mouthful of Pepper-Up Potion right onto Hermione’s hair. “You *what?”*

“So… erm… you know when two people love each other very much…”

“Oh my god, please stop!” Padma wailed at the same time that Harry yelled, “YOU LOVE HER?”

“Yes,” said Hermione. She was smiling now, softly, like she couldn’t help herself. “Yes, I do.”

“I didn’t even know you two were dating.” Harry scratched at his head. This would require another bottle of Pepper-Up Potion, he decided.

“I’m not sure I’d call it dating, really, more like a companionship. But we were going to tell you. Just not until we were ready, and then Padma…”

Harry glanced over at Padma who was floating the runes again and doing her best to ignore them.

“Right, Padma.”

“We’re actually planning on moving in together soon.”

“Wow… that’s… um, congratulations.” He *definitely* needed another bottle of Pepper-Up now. If not something stronger.

“Thank you, Harry.” Hermione set down her books and gathered him in a hug. “Thank you for understanding.”

“Um… sure. No problem, Hermione.” He patted her head awkwardly until she pulled away. “Are you going to tell Ron?”

Hermione grimaced. “Yes, eventually. He won’t be happy about it. Never did get over his hatred of Slytherins.”

“You might be surprised,” said Harry, thinking back to Malfoy Manor, Ron draping an old quilt over Malfoy’s shoulders.

Hermione smiled at him, taking his hand, and Harry let her.

“Hey, so this has been lovely and all,” Padma called from the corner, “but the spell’s just picked up a location for the robes.”

“Excellent,” said Harry, grinning. “Let’s go catch a murderer.”

🔥

Harry and Padma went, Harry remembering at the last minute to grab the preset Portkeys and slipping one into Padma’s pocket. One could never be too diligent.

Padma held the cloth in her palm, the circle of spinning runes periodically flashing and urging them forward. They trekked across the city, making periodic jumps, and landed on a deserted street in South Hackney.

“Strange,” said Padma, squinting down the street. “It’s a Sunday, and there’s no one around.”

Harry raised his wand, slashing an *X* through the air. “The Muggle Repelling Charms in this area are strong.”

“Muggle Repelling Charms in a Muggle neighbourhood?” Padma’s eyebrow raised. “Strange,” she said again.

They walked down the empty street, old newspapers flying across the cobblestones, wind whistling between the buildings.

The runes flashed blue one last time then collapsed. They had stopped in front of a row of flats, old but well-kept. With Padma ushering him along, they climbed the steps to the townhouse at the end of the lane.

“No… it can’t be…” said Harry, staring at the familiar green knocker. He couldn’t help grazing it with his hand, reaching out and making sure it was real. From a nearby window, a single candle glowed—a savage yellow searing right into Harry’s retinas and burning them from within.

“What is it?” Padma did a sweep of her wand, checking the shadows.

Harry swallowed. “This is Draco Malfoy’s flat.”

🔥

Chapter End Notes

dun dun DUN

Chapter 6: I should stop you.

When I was sixteen, my senses fooled me
Thought gasoline was on my clothes
I knew that something would always rule me
I knew the scent was mine alone

Draco had always known he was living on borrowed time.

From the moment he had been born, Draco knew time was never his own. Sometimes it belonged to Father, sometimes it was Mother's, more recently it was in the Dark Lord's ruthless hands. But never his, never truly his own.

What would Draco do with his own time?

He didn't even know, and yet, time was running out.

Greg sprinted ahead of him, the flames looming overhead. Somewhere deep in the inferno, Vince screamed. Draco didn't need to turn around to know Vince's fate.

Running faster and faster, tripping over destroyed objects, coughing out a swirl of smoke—running until they couldn't, until a towering stack blocked their path.

"Do something!" Greg screamed, cowering behind a blackened wardrobe as it fell. He had never looked so small before, so afraid.

Draco turned towards the fire, slowly raising his wand.

But he couldn't do anything, could only stand there, wand shaking in his hand, watching the flames steadily creep closer.

The flames were mesmerising—trapped in a fleeting dance, winking in swift sultry movements. Draco was lost to them, enveloped by their heat, surrounded by their smell. They beckoned him closer.

"Malfoy, move!" Potter's call broke him from his reverie.

From the back of Potter's broom, Draco glanced back at the flames.

He watched them wave goodbye.

Directly following the Battle of Hogwarts, Draco barely left his room. Mother mostly avoided him. Father was occupied with a short stint in Azkaban that got shorter by the day.

He cradled the wand to his chest, his *new* wand. They hadn't allowed him to have his old Hawthorn wand back. It was a national treasure now—used to defeat the Dark Lord, held by the great Harry Potter. Draco would never see it again.

He missed it. He mourned for it. *Surely it was just a wand,* some would say. Yes, but it had been *his* wand, his and his alone.

Draco spent hour after hour in his room with his new wand, lighting the tip, casting shadows along the wall. The house elves brought him candles, night after night, more and more candles until there were enough to cover every surface of his room.

He sat back in his chair and watched them flicker, watched them dance.

They had scared him at first, all that light, all that heat contained in one brilliant pinpoint of fire. That was before he realised he could pass a finger through the flame unscathed. Then a hand. Then an arm.

Soon, he was standing in a room full of flames, carpet burning beneath his feet, bedspread disintegrating in his hands. But the flames did not touch him, did not burn him.

They *listened* to him.

Two and a half months after the end of the war, the Daily Prophet appeared with his morning breakfast. A picture of Harry Potter grimaced up at him from the front page, today's blessed birthday boy.

Draco let the paper burn.

🔥

The first time it happened was an accident.

It was a few years later, long enough for Draco to be forced out of his decaying room, long enough for Father to return from Azkaban, alive and not entirely whole.

"You're always sulking around," his father chided, tapping his cane. "It's time you got out of the house again. Relearn your place in wizarding high society."

"Society is a construct," Draco responded blithely, taking in how very much Knockturn Alley had not changed. An entire wizarding war, the complete upheaval of a fascist regime, and still the alley remained the same.

His father sneered, raised his cane as if he wanted to hit something, then lowered it.

"Ah, Mr Malfoy." The clerk at Borgin and Burkes bowed behind the counter. "And the young Mr Malfoy."

"Greetings, Borgin. I'd like to make a trade." His father strode into the shop, and Draco could already see the bags of coins swimming in Borgin's eyes.

It was despicable, loathsome. Had neither of them learned anything from the war?

Draco barely touched the handle of his wand, and the clerk burst into flames. Father stumbled back, alarmed.

It was quick, efficient. One second he was there; the next second he was not.

Father banished the pile of ashes with a flick, gave Draco a cold stare. “You will speak of this to no one.” He grabbed Draco by the back of the neck and dragged him outside.

Draco moved out of the manor, the official reason being he wanted to experience the workings of greater society to better manage the Malfoy family affairs, the actual reason being *he couldn’t fucking stand it.*

He found a job at the Ministry down in filing, simple and unobtrusive. It wasn’t the most interesting job, stacking and categorising papers day after day, but he had been cut off from his inheritance until deemed fit to return as the Malfoy heir.

Pansy helped him move the many boxes of clothes into his new flat, placed in a quiet Muggle neighbourhood, the last place his father would ever look for him should he try.

Draco spent his nights sitting in his sparsely decorated living room reading about Muggle superheroes. A boy had handed him a copy of the latest Batman at the market last week.

Draco didn’t understand it, really. Many of these so-called superheroes—morally righteous leaders of good and light—committed acts just as atrocious as the villains they claimed to be thwarting. Collapsing buildings, killing civilians, torturing for information.

Were they really super? Draco didn’t think so. But was it necessary? Was it justice? Maybe.

He read long into the night, flipping between colourful pages and impossible stories.

In the front window, a candle burned, hot and bright.

This was Draco’s life now: trudging listlessly between his flat and the Ministry, occasionally taking dinner with Mother at the manor, and spending the lonely nights at the bar lost in thought.

And it worked for many years, so long in fact that Draco had almost convinced himself it was enough, that the time passing by was finally *his*.

But then, the file landed on his desk.

To anyone else it would have been an ordinary file filled with tax documents, records of property sales, and completely forgettable death certificates. However, to Draco, it was the file that changed everything.

Because it was fake.

Sure, not everything. A few names were real—Draco recognised them from the posh Ministry balls Mother used to make him attend—but the details, the papers, the *trails of money* were all fake.

Now why would that be?

Draco set the file aside, frowning.

The next day, he couldn't stop thinking about it, all those inconclusive details, tiny errors in calculations. He spent the afternoon digging through the rest of the files.

As it turned out, the Richardsons were a busy family indeed. Three unregistered buildings passed down as Christmas gifts, missing money from multiple accounts, and most worrying of all, a name change from Rosier to Richardson. So small it slipped right under the Ministry's nose.

That night, Draco visited the first building belonging to the Rosier-Richarsons, a decrepit-looking warehouse out in Chelsfield.

When he left nearly an hour later, smoke was in the air, flames rising into the sky.

Draco leaned his head back in the chair, the cold leather prickling his neck.

"So, what is it you want, exactly?" The woman snapped a glove in place, her buzzed white hair nearly blinding Draco everytime he looked at it. It was whiter than even his own. She had holes in her ears larger than the ears themselves.

"I want to be born again," Draco replied.

"Alright." She shrugged, and set her hands on his bare chest.

At the first press of the needle puncturing his skin, Draco smiled.

Draco dropped the wand, clutching his chest and falling to the ground.

The fires might not harm him with their heat and their flames, but they were slowly draining his life away. Draco could feel it all the way in his soul, the way energy flowed from his fingertips everytime he cast.

He almost never ate anymore, never slept either. Soon he would be nothing more than a pile of bones, ready to be set aflame. He needed something stronger, something compatible.

He needed help.

“I need your help,” he said to Pansy, looking over the top of his menu at a gauche French cafe. It was Pansy’s turn to pay.

Pansy sighed. “What is it this time?”

“I need to break into the British Museum.”

One morning on his way to work, he bumped into Potter in the Ministry atrium. Potter’s wand clattered to the ground, and Draco bent over to retrieve it.

“Here,” he said, handing it back.

Potter took it silently, eyes narrowing, but it was too late. Draco had already gotten what he wanted.

Hidden beneath Draco’s robes, the Hawthorn wand glowed, recognizing its new master—or an old master returned home.

It took the Ministry a long time to notice anything amiss, but eventually not even the most underpaid idiot could deny the string of magical fires escalating within the past few months.

Draco came to work one morning to find the Minister himself leaning against Draco’s desk.

“I know it was you,” Minister Shacklebolt rumbled, looking at Draco with a piercing stare.

“I believe you are mistaken, Minister.” Draco set his briefcase on his chair.

Shacklebolt paced around the desk, hands clasped behind his back, the picture of perfect ease. “You are the only person who could have pieced together the information about the afflicted families.” He glanced in Draco’s direction, and Draco stiffened in place. “However, you forget that you are not the only one with access to those files.”

Draco crossed his arms, the Hawthorn wand humming beneath his robes. One twitch, and the Minister would be nothing more than a pile of ashes. “If you knew,” said Draco, “why haven’t you stopped them? Why have you let these criminals remain?”

“Because in the eyes of the law, they are not criminals. We’ve already tried bringing them in, but there’s nothing to hold them with.” Shacklebolt gave a weary sigh, leaning a hand against Draco’s desk. “And it isn’t a crime to change one’s name.”

“Nor, apparently, is it to hoard valuables from Imperiused Muggleborns and resell them to the highest bidder.” Draco sneered.

“We have no proof of the objects’ origins. The Ministry has already looked into the matter and found the Muggleborns’ recollections… lacking.”

“What use is the Ministry, then, if they cannot fix what is right in front of them?”

“Precisely,” said Shacklebolt. “Which is why *I* cannot do anything. I cannot fix this terrible oversight.”

Draco simply stared at him. Surely the Minister was not suggesting that *Draco* of all people —

“It is my advice, Mr Malfoy”—Minister Shacklebolt stopped in the doorway, robes flowing out and swallowing his broad frame—“to think critically before continuing with this endeavour.”

He swept away, leaving Draco to wonder if he had even visited at all.

Draco started casting bigger fires, better fires. With Shacklebolt’s permission, he succeeded in dismantling the largest Dark artefacts trading ring in lower Britain, culminating in the demolition of an entire block of Muggle flats filled with so many cursed objects, Dark magic was practically seeping through the walls.

It was around then that Potter started following him. A flash of black hair on his way to work, the telling gleam of round glasses outside his bedroom window.

Draco returned to his flat one evening and immediately knew something was amiss. Nothing had been taken, nothing moved. He would never have known an intruder had been there if it weren’t for Potter’s aftershave lingering in the air.

He added a couple spells, charmed his knocker to notify him if someone so much as approached his front door, and sat back in his leather armchair to read the latest Batman. The batcave truly was revolutionary.

He debated moving the candle on the sill, but in the end, the candle stayed, burning as bold and bright as ever—waiting, pulsing, consuming.

It was after the Hogsmeade fire.

All those careful Entrapment Charms, his meticulously-made intercrossing web of spellwork, and Potter had blown them away with a blast of his wand, the clerk and shop owners escaping the flames. It had taken a stroke of pure genius for Draco to later sneak into their hospital room and poison them with the very potion they had been brewing in the back of their shop, the same poison distributed amongst the Dark Lord’s inner circle during the war and administered in excess. Amelia Bones had been an unfortunate victim of that nasty brew.

The next week Potter cornered him in the loo, and Draco thought, *He must know.*

But no, Potter wanted him for a completely different reason.

Draco didn't know why he did it, but when Potter pushed him against the cold bathroom wall, Draco melted in his arms. It had been so long since someone had held him like that, touched him like that. Even if there was hate in Potter's eyes, violence in his touch, Draco craved it. Draco *needed* it.

The anger and vitriol spitting from Potter's sneering lips, Draco needed that too. He let Potter fuck his mouth, let Potter pound his unrelenting cock into Draco's willing body. He let Potter make him scream.

Because that was what Draco deserved, right? *Death Eater. Scum. Useless. Worthless.*

Before the sun rose, he slipped out of Potter's bed and returned home. For the first time, he blew out the candle on the sill.

"You're becoming careless." Minister Shacklebolt looked up from the paper in his hand, a report on the Hogsmeade fire. They were in the Minister's office on the top floor. Draco had never been invited in before.

"Am I?" said Draco, straightening his robes. "Or just more thorough?"

Shacklebolt sighed. "There is nothing I can do if you get caught."

"Don't worry, Minister," Draco said, standing from the chair. "I won't get caught."

He was jealous. He knew that was what it was, watching Potter with another witch, watching the way their lips melded together, Potter's fingers tangling in hair that wasn't Draco's.

In a flurry of robes, Draco Apparated to the manor. Mother and Father were just finishing their evening tea.

"Darling?" Mother set down her cup.

"Get out," said Draco. "I need to speak to Father alone."

"Surely, whatever it is you need to say—"

"Get out." Draco seethed, hands shaking at his sides. "And take your case with you."

Mother slowly rose from her chair and glided up the stairs. She looked back one last time, her eyes an unfathomable blue, then Apparated away. As soon as she was gone, Draco had his father pinned against the nearest wall, the Hawthorn wand sparking at his throat.

"Give me one reason," Draco said. "Give me one reason why I shouldn't."

Father lifted his head, chin tilting up in a mockery of bravery. "Draco, my son. What other reason is there? We're family."

Later that night, Draco watched the flames from the front lawn. They were so tall they reached the sky.

No matter how callous, no matter how upset Mother would be, Draco didn't regret it.

It brought Potter back to him.

"I cannot allow this to continue." The minister loomed above Draco's cramped desk down in filing.

Draco dabbed his quill in the ink bottle and continued writing.

"Robards was one step too far," Shacklebolt declared, his voice stern.

"I have no idea what you mean, Minister." Draco reached a hand under his cloak and grasped the handle of the Hawthorn wand.

"This is unacceptable, Mr Malfoy. I can no longer condone—" Shacklebolt paused mid-sentence, mouth hanging open in dazed surprise.

"Yes?" Draco looked up from his papers, putting on a worried expression. "Are you quite alright, Minister? You look unwell."

"I—" Shacklebolt wiped a hand across his brow, squinting in confusion. "I—What were we talking about again?"

"You were unhappy with the formatting on the McSquire file. You requested that I transcribe it again."

"I—yes. That's—yes, of course." The Minister slowly shook his head, as if dislodging cobwebs from his brain. Draco supposed that was an apt description for what a strong *Obliviate* felt like.

"Well, carry on then."

"Thank you, Minister." Draco tipped his head in a small bow and bit the inside of his cheek to keep from grinning.

Things were good for a while. Whenever Draco got the urge—the sick, twisted craving for heat and flames—he went to Potter, and Potter lit a fire under his skin that burned him from within.

In a tangle of limbs, a whisper of lips, Potter kept the cravings at bay, kept him satisfied.

Draco hoped it would be enough.

🔥

The imposter ruined everything.

Afterwards, Draco visited the scene of the crime. The Aurors were long gone as well as any potential useful evidence. Neighbours gathered around to pick through the rubble. Draco volunteered to help.

There was a crying woman sitting on a nearby bench and clutching an old picture frame. A man in shabby robes with a tear down the side came up and laid a hand on her shoulder. The woman flinched violently, looking up at the man in horror.

“How could you?” she wailed. “They’re gone! He’s gone!”

“Debbie, please,” the man whispered, glancing around anxiously. “You know I didn’t mean —”

“Get away from me, you monster. You killed them.” She hissed and stalked away.

“Debbie, wait!”

“Such a shame,” Draco said, coming up to stand beside the man. They both stared off into the ruined street. “They seemed like such a nice family, too. What was it? A father and a son caught in the fire? Smoked out is what the papers said.”

“What? Oh yes, yes. Quite a shame.” The man nodded solemnly, but Draco could tell he wasn’t disappointed, not really. In fact, the side of his mouth was curled into a slight smile. Draco glimpsed a gold tooth peeking out from beneath the man’s cracked lips.

“And what is your relation to Mrs Betrüg?”

“We’re neighbours—friends. Yes, good friends,” said the man, but his steady gaze on the woman’s retreating back told a different story.

“Mmm,” said Draco.

That was all he needed to know.

If a mysterious letter came in Mr Jimston’s mail a few days later requesting a consultation about the contents of his Gringotts vault, well, then no one was the wiser.

The next weekend, Draco brought a bottle of wine with him to Potter’s flat. They laughed and smiled, danced in each other’s arms, made love until they were both breathless with contentment.

Potter fell asleep on his shoulder, Draco pushing back a stray strand and brushing against the famous lightning-bolt scar.

When the moon was high, the house whispering with night, Draco slipped out of bed.

“Where are you going?” Potter mumbled, reaching out groggily and latching onto Draco’s wrist.

“No where, love.” Draco laid a hand on his cheek, and Potter’s eyes fell closed.

Draco was back by morning, slipping into Potter’s warm bed. He curled into Potter’s side and let his mind wander, dreams of heat and flames overtaking him.

Across town, the candle on the sill sparked to life. Beneath the floorboards of the living room floor in a magically sealed box, a set of smoke-filled robes lay, shabby and torn.

Draco woke to his wand buzzing by his side. Someone had set off the alarms; someone was at his flat. He hoped it wasn’t the delivery person again. He had started putting up Muggle Repelling Charms on his street because too many passersby had kept setting off the alarms.

In one fell swoop, he swung himself off the bed and noticed Potter’s note sitting on the pillowcase.

> *Dear Draco, I’ve been called into work. Some situation at Gringotts that Kingsley needs help with. I probably won’t be back until late, but feel free to make yourself at home. Maybe we can do something fun when I get back ;)*

Potter, the dolt, had made sure to draw the winking face extra large. Draco smiled as he pocketed the note.

After slipping on his robes, he stopped in the bathroom to check his hair.

He grabbed the Hawthorn wand and left Grimmauld Place, ready to meet the intruder.

Chapter 7: What if I do not want to?

“No… it can’t be…” said Harry, staring at the familiar green knocker. He couldn’t help grazing it with his hand, reaching out and making sure it was real.

“What is it?” Padma did a sweep of her wand, checking the shadows.

Harry swallowed. “This is Draco Malfoy’s flat.”

Padma was silent for a long moment. “Well, we need to check if he’s home,” she said eventually, flicking her wand and sending a Homenum Revelio Charm through the flat. “It’s empty. Wonder where he is. You said he didn’t do much besides go to work and visit his mother.”

Harry knew exactly where Malfoy was—asleep in *his* bed, blissfully unaware of the waves of turmoil pushing to the surface of Harry’s mind. He felt sick. It had to be a trick. There was no reason for Malfoy to have the robes.

If Malfoy was the arsonist… but why would he?

They searched the flat, every last crevice, and found nothing.

“You searched it before, right?” Padma poked her head around the kitchen door. “Did you find anything suspicious?”

“No. Everything was in order. Unless there’s a secret compartment I have no idea about.”

They glanced at each other, eyes widening slightly, and frantically searched again.

On their third run through, Padma stopped in the middle of the living room, intensely focused on an object on the floor.

“Is he taking any potions?”

Harry nodded his head briefly, distracted by searching the ashes in the fireplace. “Sleeping Draught. A dose right before bed. Sometimes if one isn’t enough, he’ll get up around midnight to take a second.”

Padma pursed her lips, a gesture which Harry didn’t see. If he had, maybe he would have realised he shouldn’t have known such intimate details about Malfoy’s nightly routine.

Padma nudged the bottle with her foot, eliciting a light clinking sound. She shrugged, and the search continued.

Ten minutes later, they still had found nothing.

“Do you think—”

“Shhh,” said Harry, lifting a finger to his mouth.

Harry heard the click of a key turning in a lock and the soft pad of footsteps on the stairs. He waved Padma away, positioning her just out of sight.

As the last glimpse of Padma’s Auror robes disappeared around the doorframe, Draco appeared in the entryway to the flat. His hair was slicked back, robes neatly pressed. He looked as if he had been up for hours.

“Darling,” he drawled. His face did not bely any surprise at finding Harry standing in the middle of his living room. “Whatever are you doing here? If you wanted to see me so badly, you could have just come back to yours. I’ve been waiting for ages.”

So that was how they were going to play it then. Harry slowly lowered his wand, keeping it held tightly at his side. “Didn’t you get my note?” he said, infusing his voice with as much confidence as he could muster. “I did say I probably wouldn’t be back until late.”

“Ah, so that was what your atrocious handwriting said.” Malfoy stepped into the room, daring Harry to back away. He looked straight into Harry’s eyes as he said, “I’m afraid I burned it before I could quite decipher its meaning.”

This was a delicate dance. One wrong move, and Harry knew he might never get the answers he needed. He stepped to the side, keeping the same distance between them while also blocking Malfoy from the entryway.

“It seems you have quite the inclination for burning things,” Harry said carefully.

“Well, as my father used to say ‘Don’t start fires you can’t control.’” Malfoy trailed a thin finger across the backrest of the massive leather armchair. “Such a shame he didn’t take his own advice when he set the manor on fire.”

Harry inhaled sharply. “So it was him then? I didn’t know he had it in him.”

Malfoy tsked. “It’s not as if I gave him much of a choice. Either I took him apart piece by piece, galleon by galleon until the Malfoy name was in ruins, or he took himself out of the picture on his own terms.” Malfoy’s eyes pierced into him, a swirling smoky grey. “He always was a ‘family man’, you see. Cared more about the family name than his own flesh and blood.”

“But why Malfoy? I don’t understand why.”

“Because, Potter,” Malfoy spat, pale face going a livid red. “He was a Death Eater. Was still a fucking Death Eater even after the war. You know he didn’t even regret it? Said he’d do it again. Give up his wife, force his own son into servitude. He’d fucking doing it all again.” He jabbed a finger at a picture on the wall—Draco, Lucius, and Narcissa regal and stiff as they posed for the camera. “It’s like you said, Potter. Death Eaters don’t deserve to live.”

Harry grew angry, his wand vibrating in his hand. To think he had come to trust this man, that he had *yearned* for this man. “And who are you to decide that? You were one of them!”

“Precisely,” said Malfoy. “I know *exactly* what filth goes through their minds.”

“But, but… I thought you’d changed. I thought you were different now.”

“Haven’t you been listening? I *have* changed. I am not a Death Eater anymore.” Malfoy paused before continuing in a low voice, a voice so poisonous it leaked venom through the seams. “In fact, *I despise them.”*

“You’re no better,” Harry argued stubbornly. “Setting innocent people on fire. Destroying businesses. Killing families!”

Malfoy angled his head, the yellow light reflecting off his blonde hair. It looked like a candle, soft and warm until he stuck his finger into the flames and it burned him alive. He was beautiful even when he was terrifying, even when Harry knew he was a murderer. The sharp angle of his cheekbones, the dangerous glint in his eyes. Harry wanted to pin Malfoy to the wall and fuck that defiance right out of him.

But he couldn’t do that, not with Malfoy’s secrets coming to light. And not with Padma gradually sneaking up behind Malfoy, wand at the ready.

Malfoy stepped closer, his eyes flashing. “Listen to me, Potter. Those people were far from innocent.”

“Of course, they were innocent!” Harry exploded. “Once a Death Eater, always a Death Eater. You’re a murderer. You’re no better than your father. I can’t believe I ever let you into my bed!”

“Oh, darling,” Malfoy drawled, his posh voice the same as it always was, condescending and snaking its way under Harry’s skin. “How naive you still are. That’s exactly why you fucked me the first time if I recall. You like the danger, the wrongness.”

“Fuck you, Malfoy. I don’t… I just…”

“Stop lying,” Malfoy hissed. “You *love* fucking me. You love it so much, one might go as far as to say it’s not the fucking you love, it’s m—”

Clink.

They both whipped around to see an empty bottle rolling away from where Padma had accidentally nudged it with her foot.

Then, it was a flurry of spells, a bolt of searing heat grazing Harry’s cheek as he ducked behind the armchair. The ground shaking, glass smashing, spells colliding in a deadly dance.

Malfoy waved his wand and sent Padma crashing into the wall with an effortless *"Stupefy!”*

“PADMA!” Harry screamed, which was a mistake. Malfoy rounded on him, disarming Harry with a silent swish.

The tip of Malfoy's wand glowed with light, miniature flames dancing across the tip. He raised his arm and pointed his wand straight at Padma.

They were cornered. Harry didn't care what Malfoy wanted with him, if Malfoy wanted to skin him alive. But Padma— *No, not Padma!* He couldn't be responsible for another innocent life being taken. Hadn't the Death Eaters taken enough away from him already?

He knew what he needed to do.

"Hephaestus!" Harry cried at the same time Malfoy called, *"Obliviate!"*

Everything went dark.

"Wake up," Malfoy said sharply.

Harry blinked his eyes open. He was tied to a chair, black ropes binding his hands behind his back, head bowed. His cheek burned, like he had just been slapped across the face. Knowing Malfoy, he probably had.

"Some Auror you are," said Malfoy. He took a sip of tea, legs crossed as he regarded Harry from his leather armchair.

Harry wiggled in his bonds. They remained securely tied around his wrists.

"Where's Padma? What happened? What are you going to do with me?"

"So many questions." Malfoy clicked his tongue. "And I have yet to decide what to do with you. It's all going to depend on how you behave. And you *will* behave. Won't you, Potter?" Malfoy unsheathed his wand and pointed it at Harry's throat.

It was the Hawthorn wand—the very same wand Harry had used to defeat a Dark Lord not so many years ago.

"How did you get that?"

Malfoy smirked. "Easier than you might imagine. All Pansy had to do was tap on the glass, break the magical seal and it came right to me. Wands are wonderfully loyal, especially when you win their allegiance."

Harry frowned. "But I should still be its owner."

"Tut tut," said Malfoy. "You should be more careful with your wand. So *easy* to drop them. And you never know who will pick them up."

"But I didn't—"

A memory flashed through Harry's mind. The Ministry atrium filled with morning sunlight. Malfoy stumbling into Harry and bending over to retrieve something from the ground.

“Here,” Malfoy had said, handing Harry his wand. Harry had ignored him and continued with his day.

He should have known.

That was why the fires had felt so familiar—familiar wands, familiar magic. The fires had never burned Harry. Sometimes, they even listened to him.

“Where’s Padma?” Harry said, changing the subject. Hopefully if he kept Malfoy talking, he could think of a way out of this mess. Hermione would look for him eventually. And there was a meeting this afternoon that it would be suspicious for him to miss.

“Oh, don’t worry. Your Portkey took her exactly where you wanted her to go. St Mungos, I assume. Perfectly healthy, I assure you, just with a few misplaced memories.” Malfoy took another sip of tea and gently set the cup down before continuing. “She’s currently telling your team you tragically contracted a case of Spattergroit on your latest bust and will be out of commission for a few days. It will be a miracle if you make it out of bed, my word.”

“That’s… thoughtful of you.” Harry grit his teeth.

So much for Hermione or anyone from the Ministry coming to look for him. Malfoy could keep him here, chained up and locked away, and no one would be the wiser. Not until it was too late.

Malfoy leaned forward, the tip of his wand grazing Harry’s throat. “Come now. Don’t look at me like that. I haven’t killed you yet, have I?”

Harry spat at him, a glob of saliva landing on Malfoy’s forehead. “You *killed* them.” Harry seethed. “You killed Robards. You killed the Betrügs and Jimston.”

A dark look flashed over Malfoy’s face. He looked practically deranged with the way his hair shone and his wand sparked. But in the next moment, the look was gone, replaced by one of smug contempt.

“Robards was a shame.” Malfoy leaned away, letting his wand fall. He wiped Harry’s saliva from his face. “I told him not to go inside the manor, but he wouldn’t listen. So righteous even until the very end. Such a pity, really, such a waste of raw power. And then afterwards, the minister wouldn’t leave me alone—”

Harry stilled. He seemed to stop breathing entirely. “Kingsley knows?”

Malfoy’s eyes glittered. “Well, he doesn’t anymore. I had to Obliviate him after Robards’s mistake. All his moping around, it was starting to affect my work, you see.”

“You absolute bastard. You can’t just—to the *minister* —”

“Ahh, yes. And then, let’s see.” Malfoy sat back and twirled the Hawthorn wand. “The Betrügs, now there’s where you’ve got it all wrong.” He summoned the pot of tea. A black kettle zoomed in from the kitchen. “Tea?” he said.

Harry jerked his head no.

Malfoy shrugged and took a sip, his cup steaming. “It is true I got rid of Jimston. Very clever, by the way, tracking his old robes here.” He gave Harry a slippery smile. It made Harry’s stomach churn. “But what you don’t see, what you never comprehend, is *why.”*

“Why then, Malfoy”—Harry kept his voice infuriatingly calm—“did you lure Jimston into his vault and set him on fire?”

“Revenge… Justice… Penance.” Malfoy uncrossed his legs. “Because Mrs Betrüg was fucking him on the side. He wanted them to run away together, but she would never leave her family, her *child* behind. So, he got rid of them, and I got rid of *him.”* He looked forlornly off to the side, but Harry knew it was all an act now. “I can’t bring back her son, but she’s better off without that murderer in her life. That was the best I could do in the end.”

“That’s not—he wouldn’t—”

“Don’t try to deny it. You felt his fire. Surely, you realised it was different. That’s because it wasn’t *mine.”* Malfoy was looking at him, trapping Harry in his gaze.

It was true what Malfoy had said. Harry had always known the Carnaby Street fire had been started by an imposter. It had been too wild, too uncontrolled. But he was afraid to admit that now. He did not want to agree with anything Malfoy said.

“Harry,” Malfoy purred. He leaned closer again, hot breath washing over Harry’s face. “Admit it. Just admit what you feel.”

They were so close now, Malfoy’s whispers floating between them. Harry’s body felt flushed, his heart beating too fast. He was supposed to hate Malfoy, hate the very idea of him.

An arsonist, a sadist, a *murderer.*

But Malfoy was tilting his head and moving closer… and why was Harry not flinching away?... and Malfoy still smelled like smoke even now…

Their lips met, Malfoy’s cold and insistent, pressing harder until Harry had no choice but to open his own.

How many times had Harry dreamt of this? He had wanted this for so long—to kiss Malfoy, to lick into those thin lips, to curl his tongue around Malfoy’s moans.

And now that he had it, he couldn’t… he couldn’t do it.

Harry bit down hard on Malfoy’s bottom lip, tasting blood, Malfoy’s violence-tainted blood.

Malfoy withdrew and looked into Harry’s eyes, testing him. He grabbed Harry’s chin, forcefully yanking it upward, and leaned in again. *Behave,* he seemed to say.

Their second kiss was softer, sweeter. Malfoy teased him with sharp nips and little flicks of his tongue. Even with Harry holding himself still as a statue, he knew eventually he would

succumb.

Malfoy's hands wound through his hair, tilting his head at a nearly painful angle, and pulled him closer. It settled on the back of his neck, holding him in rigid restraint. Malfoy's other hand drifted over his chest, an insistent path leading down.

"That's it." Malfoy broke apart, leaving Harry gasping, but Malfoy's lips did not leave him, simply trailed higher and whispered in his ear. "You're so good, darling. *So* so good. Yes, that's it. Be good for me. *Harry."*

Good, because Harry was good. Harry could be good. Harry could be *so* good.

Harry drew in a sharp breath, the smell of smoke tingling his nose. He *was* good. He was a leader of light, someone people depended on. He held their hope in his hands, and he would not disappoint them. He could not sacrifice their hope to his passion.

Magic surged through Harry's palms. The ropes snapped, and Harry lunged.

He circled one hand around Malfoy's bony wrist, the Hawthorn wand falling to the floor. His other hand shoved at Malfoy's chest.

Malfoy fell back.

They grappled for a moment, harsh knees kicked into sore shins, pointy elbows lodged under gasping ribs. Harry gained the upper hand, aching thighs straddling Malfoy's bony rib cage as he pinned Malfoy to the floor.

"You should have known by now," said Harry, "that I don't actually need a wand to do magic."

Malfoy clutched uselessly, reaching for his wand. With a flick of his hand, Harry made it skitter across the room.

He would have no more of Malfoy's defiance now.

It would be so easy taking what he wanted, turning Malfoy in. He could take Malfoy's memories, leave him as nothing more than an empty shell. He could cast the curse, watch the light fade from Malfoy's eyes, retribution for all the lives he had taken.

"Do it, then." Malfoy sneered as if he knew what Harry was thinking. "Punish me for my sins."

Harry wrapped both hands around Malfoy's throat, and Malfoy's eyes flickered, the grey swirling like smoke by a campfire.

He pressed down, magic surging through his palms.

🔥

About a year later

Harry got the call at the end of the day, just as he was slipping on his coat. The sun had already set, but he and the rest of the team were still hard at work.

“New arson case!” he barked in a passing imitation of Robards’s gruff voice, throwing open the office door. “Weasley! Patil! You’re coming with me!” He summoned his belongings and carefully slipped his wand into the holster around his waist.

In record time, Lavender and Padma jogged up to him, Harry holding the lift door long enough for them to squeeze inside. He saw Lavender’s labrador patronus disappear down the hall, on its way home to Ron and their newborn.

“Been a while,” said Lavender. She pressed the button for the atrium.

“A little over a year since the last one,” agreed Padma, grabbing a handhold as the lift jerked backwards.

“Hmm, that’s right,” said Lavender. “There was the bank, and then they sort of just stopped. Until we had that one last May with Erdwin’s Robes Shop, wasn’t it? But then, it turned out they were reproducing Death Eater memorabilia and behind the attacks on the Thames. I feel bad for saying this, but they almost deserved it.”

“Weasley! We’re still on duty. Please refrain from expressing your personal opinions until we’re off the clock.”

“Sorry, boss.” Lavender mimed sealing her lips and winked in Harry’s direction.

They landed in the middle of Ironmonger Lane, the entire street in chaos. There was only one building on fire for which Harry was grateful. It was still going to be difficult subduing it with the amount of Muggles running around. And the clean-up would take hours.

A harried-looking woman immediately approached them, her hair frazzled and speckled with ashes. “Everyone’s already evacuated, but it’s still spreading. We don’t know what to do.” She wrung her hands nervously in front of her. “And to think this happened right after the matron disappeared. Oh dear, oh dear. This is horrible, horrible luck.”

A cluster of children huddled off to the side, looking frightened and entirely too thin. *Orphans.* Harry knew the look of them. Some of them had healing bruises peeking out from under the collars of their shirts. The building going up in flames had been the orphanage, the only home these children had ever known. Harry would make sure to petition the Minister for funds for a new building after all this was over.

“Oh dear, oh no!” The woman startled as a pillar collapsed at her feet.

“I’ll take the southside,” Harry volunteered before he could get stuck on babysitting duty.

“Be careful!” Lavender called.

“He’ll be fine. He always is,” Padma muttered.

They made a good team, Lavender and Padma. Possibly even better than Harry and Padma had been. Harry had seen the stats since Ron had left on paternity leave and Padma had become Lavender's Auror partner. The crime rate had never been lower.

Harry strode to the back of the orphanage, staring up at it as the flames swallowed it whole. His wand hung at his side, patiently swaying. Soon he would start casting the Suffocation, Air Displacement, and Heat Disbursement Charms.

Soon, but not yet.

As the inferno rushed higher, the walls blackening with each gentle caress, Harry caught a flash of white through the flames. There, standing in a sea of red, was a tall figure, face haloed by smoke and fire, pointed chin raised high in the air.

The moment hung around them, neither one moving, neither one breathing, each taking in the other.

Finally, the figure gave Harry a sharp nod and Disapparated.

Harry raised his wand, suddenly ready to be done with this menial task and go home.

He looked forward to returning to Grimmauld Place, to his warm bed smelling like smoke.

🔥

Wicked reds, ghastly oranges, haunting blues, savage yellows.

The fire is you and your creation. You take a deep breath, breathing in truth and conviction, and the fire rises higher. With each beat, each pulse of red through your veins, you burn a little brighter, a little hotter.

You look at me through the flames, your eyes the colour of smoke.

I should contain you. I should stop you.

What if I do not want to?

🔥

When I was a man, I thought it ended
When I knew love's perfect ache
But my peace has always depended
On all the ashes in my wake

🔥

Image Description: Draco is standing in the middle of raging red and orange flames, though they do not appear to be hurting him. His face is turned upward in a haughty expression, a single hand resting on the front of his billowing black cloak. End description.

End Notes

Did you see it coming? Lmk in the comments 👀. And thank you again, Kairennart, for the STUNNING FANTASTIC BEAUTIFUL art!!! Go check out their tumblr for more fabulous art!

🎵 This work is part of H/D Wireless, a song inspired, anon, Drarry fest with its home on tumblr!

If you enjoyed this, shower our content creators with all the love you have to give by leaving kudos ❤ and comments 💌 on their work!

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